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## **Social Media, Journalism and Crisis: Twitter Representation of #SyrianRefugees in Western News Media**

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SOCIAL MEDIA, JOURNALISM AND CRISIS: TWITTER REPRESENTATION OF  
#SYRIANREFUGEES IN WESTERN NEWS MEDIA

by

Ahmad Khaled AlShallal

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Graduate School,  
the College of Arts and Sciences  
and the School of Communication  
at The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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## ABSTRACT

Generally, there have been conflicts in the world regarding media coverage especially on #SyrianRefugees in Western media. It is undebatable that the Western states have political stability and peace; thus, they remain better hosts for asylum seekers and other refugees who come in search of greener pastures. However, current trends have hindered such countries from being ideal hubs because citizens have basic fears including those related to national security. Refugee situations have attracted lots of controversies over the years to the point that the concern is evident in the media. This dissertation explores the crisis of Syrian refugees and the unending arguments associated with conflicts as seen in #SyrianRefugees. Technology has fueled a number of perspectives on social media platforms where most people react to posts and tweets. Media organizations such as CNN indicated that Syrian refugees were not embraced. For instance, only five states in the United States showed interest in housing these refugees while the rest demonstrated reluctance. Twitter users opposed various moves made to house refugees and research has it that these claims are shared by people as the representation of their home governments. The Syrian crisis was debated widely on social media and especially on Twitter. Global sparks were evident on Twitter when a number of people drowned in the Mediterranean Sea attempting to reach Europe for settlement. Such dangers for refugees were tweeted in an attempt to touch the hearts of governments and human organizations across the world. In response, the claims reached relevant authorities such as the EU who signed treaties with Turkey to accommodate Syrians. Overall, the Syrian crisis was covered widely on Twitter.

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## CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

Over the years, technological advancement has resulted in diverse impacts across various industries. One common merit linked to the advancement of technology is the ability to ensure that tasks are delivered effectively and within relatively shorter durations than other avenues. Ergo, most corporations as well as individuals have strived to employ new technologies in the accomplishment of various tasks regardless of their magnitude. In this way, the importance of technology in the world today cannot be underscored.

The media industry is one sector that has been on the frontline in using technology to ensure that objectives are achieved. Specifically, the aim of most, if not all, media outlets is to ensure that accurate information reaches the highest number of individuals within the shortest time possible, while maintaining a reasonable budget. With this objective, the adoption of new technological avenues is often the most feasible option for media outlets. Thus, in the recent years, most media have committed to the extensive use of digital frameworks to ensure that the desired information is relayed and accurate feedback from the audience is collected. The feedback is essential as it ideally plays a crucial role in the definition of the state of affairs surrounding a given event.

When media and technology are mentioned at the same time, it is inevitable that social media comes next. Social media is perhaps the most obvious marker to indicate the start of the digital era in communication. The structuring of social media platforms across the internet can be credited with the success of the platforms in the world today. Abstractly, social media platforms operate through the principle of social clustering. That is, people with similar social interests or beliefs are able to interact online bounded by

their homogeneous social needs. However, this does not mean that the social media platforms prevent people of different ideals from interacting. By the number of subscribers and activity rate, some of the top social media platforms include Facebook and Twitter. In Facebook, users are clustered by groups and pages that discuss different issues and topics. Additionally, the platform uses hashtags to cluster similar topics together, making it easier for the subscribers to interact. Twitter, on the other hand, is comparatively more vibrant than Facebook. Typically, global issues and topics usually encounter a more serious and rapid reaction from the Twitter community. Through the use of hashtags, topics can easily go viral on Twitter before diffusing into other social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook. It is noteworthy that most global heads of state and other corporate leaders use Twitter for much of their communication. A case in point is the current United States president, as well as his predecessor, who used this platform for much of their communications, either formal or informal.

Social media platforms are comprised of all kinds of communication and interaction is achieved. These media platforms demonstrate transparency and also publicize new phenomena. Although there are stipulations in the use of these media and guidelines for disseminating information, they cannot be controlled entirely. Hence, it is difficult to control negative information found in the various forms of social platforms.

Twitter, due to its vibrant nature and overly independent users, has been on the frontline in the propagation of both false and reliable information. Regardless of the authenticity of the information or trending topic, a lot of opinionated information can be collected from simply following trending hashtags. This forms the primary basis of the arguments and conclusions that will be presented in this dissertation. The opinionated

feedback by Twitter users to fit their desired outcomes regarding various trends is underpinned by a process known as framing. By contextual definition, framing encompasses a situation where different individuals seek to skew the interpretation and the representation of a given phenomenon (Alpeyrie, Luczkiw, & Timmermann, 2017). On Twitter, users will follow a given hashtag that is of interest to them and offer their diverse opinions through framing. A cumulative evaluation of the opinions under a given hashtag will create the direction of the trend in question. It is for this reason that Twitter is one of the biggest trendsetters in the social media sphere today.

#### Statement of Problem

Since 2015, refugees, as well as asylum seekers, have become more prevalent, especially in the Western world. Unlike the promotion of multiculturalism, multiplicity, social cohesion and equality, refugees often face preconceptions, labels, and rejection (Vlaicu & Bălăuță, 2017). They are further branded and talked about in a manner that may escalate their social exclusion, even in cases where the dissemination of information is carried out by professionals who should help them. Such professionals came from prominent media houses such as the BBC, CNN, Fox News, and Aljazeera, which are supposed to not only disseminate information but also guarantee that such people integrate smoothly into the society. Therefore, this study will seek to determine how Syrian refugees were depicted, especially in the Western media.

In this light, this dissertation will be guided by the purpose statement that the Western media has created negative frames in the coverage of the Syrian Refugees Crisis on Twitter.

## Research Objectives

The following objectives will guide the study:

1. To determine how the Western countries' citizens have used the social media platform Twitter during the Syrian crisis;
2. To establish how the networks like BBC, CNN, Fox News, and Aljazeera have used #Syrianrefugees on their Twitter platforms.
3. To determine the impact of positive depiction of refugees on Twitter;
4. To determine the portrayal of Syrian refugees on Western media Twitter.

## Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How have the Western country's citizens used the social media platform, Twitter, during the Syrian crisis?
2. How have networks such as the BBC, CNN, Fox News, and Aljazeera used #Syrianrefugees on their Twitter platforms?
3. What is the portrayal of Syrian refugees on Western media Twitter?

## Justification and Significance of Study

A study on the portrayal of refugees on social media found different representations of this group on the social platform. Instead of these social platforms promoting diversity, cohesion, and equality, they instead result in preconceptions and rejections. The refugee crisis in Europe has resulted in protracted conflicts in cyberspace (Vlaicu & Bălăuță, 2017). The study found that the refugees are facing humiliation, downgrading, social segregation, and even criminalization. With the ongoing Syrian

crisis, there is a need to study the depiction of the Syrian expatriates on social platforms such as Twitter.

The findings of this research will be of great importance to scholars and other researchers in the field of mass communication as it will form a basis for further investigation. It will help media networks in understanding how their representation of refugees has impacted them. The study will further be of significance to the policymakers who deal with regulating the type and dissemination of information on the media platforms.

### Structure

This research paper is structured into five distinct chapters that are guided by the core objectives of the dissertation. Chapter One presents the introduction of the thematic coverage of the paper. Specifically, the chapter states the problem that will be addressed. With the statement of the problem, the foundation of the research objectives as well as the research questions is established. The rationale and the significance of the study is also presented in Chapter One. The second chapter is the Literature Review. This section reviews the various literature that is aimed at enhancing information for the purposes of answering the research questions. The third chapter is the Methodology. This chapter identifies the nature of data that will be used and how it will be analyzed in tandem with the research objectives. The fourth chapter covers the analysis and presents the study findings. Here, the analyzed data—either primary or secondary—are analyzed and the results are measured against the objectives of the paper. Ideally, this section uses facts collected by the researcher to consolidate the affiliation of the paper. Chapter Five



provides the overall conclusion of the research. It is in this section that the paper answers all the research questions by consolidating the finalities of each chapter.

## CHAPTER II – LITERATURE REVIEW

### The Syrian Civil War

Understanding the dynamics of the Syrian Civil War is crucial in the development of the background of this research. The rationale for the comprehensive review of the Syrian Civil War is to present the underlying circumstances that influenced the opinions of the Twitter users as well as the media houses that engaged with the #SyrianRefugees trend on Twitter. Specifically, the civil war is the major and perhaps only cause of the region's refugee crisis that sparked global interest, something that was attributed to rapid engagement with #SyrianRefugees on Twitter and other social media platforms.

In recent years, the Syrian Civil War has grabbed the headlines across the globe because of its social magnitude as well as structural damages. Additionally, the crisis was defined by ever-increasing death tolls as well as the displacement of individuals from their homes (Abouzeid, 2018). Today, the crisis is still ongoing and the tensions keep rising, further increasing the potential that the crisis will escalate into a more devastating conflict.

The Syrian Civil War is being fought among many different armed factions in Syria. Abstractly, the war is fought between the government and various factions that are opposed to the regime. The Ba'aathist Syrian Arab Republic is led by Syrian President Bashir al-Assad and is helped by a variety of foreign and domestic allies. The other side is comprised of smaller factions that are united by the common goal to protest the rule of the Assad regime. These factions include the Free Syrian Army, the Sunni opposition rebel units, the Kurdish-Arab Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the Salafi set of Jihadi militia, the Islamic State of Iraq, and the Levant (ISIL) (Brown, 2018). Other countries

such as Russia, the United States of America, Turkey, France, and Iran have taken different sides in the war because of their national interests as well as the ever-growing humanitarian concerns. Specifically, the Syrian Armed Forces (and the Assad regime for that matter) has received international support from Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah. The United States, on the other hand, has facilitated numerous airstrikes as well as covert operations against ISIL, which is identified as a terror group by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) (Briggs, Soderlund, & Najem, 2017). Through the material, financial, and intelligence support of the SDF as well as the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria, the United States has managed to extend its military operations in the attack of the Assad-led military factions. Turkey, on the other hand, has become more engaged in the civil war with strong retaliations and attacks against the Syrian government forces and their allies. According to Armitage (2017), most of the international military powerhouses that have taken a rather neutral stance on the civil war have also taken military actions to mitigate the associated threats. Israel, for instance, has commissioned several airstrikes against Iranian and Hezbollah forces operating in Syria on grounds that they posed a national security to Israel and its economic activities.

The Syrian Civil War is the result of the lack of containment of the Arab Spring protests that gained traction in Syria in 2011. Members of the Syrian citizenry were within their rights when they took to the streets to protest against the Assad regime. The continuous protests pushed the government to resort to violent measures that caused the deaths of hundreds of unarmed protesters ( International Crisis Group, 2017). The civil unrest quickly escalated into a fully-fledged civil war on March 15 with armed conflict and unrest in Damascus and Aleppo, two of the largest cities in Syria.

The Syrian Civil War has sparked a lot of global attention that has been highlighted by virtually all the media platforms. Many came to lose their lives and property as the conflict escalated from simple political unrest into a more violent civil war. Following the formation of allies with different objectives and the influence by international parties, the scale of the war and—by extension—the human and structural damage increased significantly (Gowans, 2017). The escalation led to the use of chemical weapons, cluster bombs, thermobaric weapons, ballistic missiles, and the anti-tank missiles.

Various nations and Western media have been campaigning against the use of chemical weapons in warfare. However, despite the global outcry against the use of chemical weapons, they were used against unarmed civilians in Syria. During the Ghouta attacks in 2013, chemical agents caused hundreds of deaths. This aroused the attention of the international community and forced the United Nations to take action. The United Nations investigated and confirmed the use of mustard agent, sarin, and chlorine gas in various attacks in the country. Most of the chemical weapons used in the civil war were commissioned under the commandeering of President Assad, leading to many casualties. In particular, Assad was held accountable for issuing direct orders to use chlorine gas in attacking the opposition factions in the towns of Sarmin and Talmenes in 2014 (Çakmak, 2017). ISIL was also held accountable for the use of sulfur mustard gas in the attacks in Marea, a year after the Sarmin and Talmenes chemical attacks. The extensive use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Civil War established motive for international players like the United States and the European Union to get involved in the conflict—specifically to destroy the Syrian government’s chemical weapons.

The Syrian Civil War is also characterized by the use of cluster bombs in various attacks. In its basic form, the civil unrest in Syria was supposed to be a government vs. civilian conflict. However, the lack of moderated reaction by the government and the influence of international parties prompted the use of more advanced military hardware in the conflict. The Convention on Cluster Munitions posits that countries should not use cluster bombs in any form of conflict, be it internal or external. Syria, however, is not a party to the convention and the Syrian Army used cluster bombs on the opposition factions. To make matters worse, the Syrian Army used the cluster bombs on unarmed civilians, further violating the human rights of the Syrian population (Lister, 2017). As a result of the use of the cluster bombs by the Assad-friendly factions and the Syrian Army, thousands of civilians have lost their lives and many survivors have permanent injuries.

Russia has shown open support to the Assad regime and lent military support through various phases on the conflict. Russia is known for its proficiency in the development of thermobaric weapons that cause massive damage, especially in confined areas like cities. Also referred to as fuel-air bombs, thermobaric munitions have the potential to cause damage in an 80,000-square-meter area in only a single round. Ergo, the use of such a weapon against poorly armed civilians is unmatched and will result in thousands of casualties, women and children included. Russia oversaw the setup of a TOS-1 Buratino rocket launcher in Syria; the launcher is capable of launching multiple rockets with thermobaric capabilities (Heing, 2017). The use of such advanced weapons in the conflict created a huge media buzz, especially when they were used and resulted in massive casualties in the Battle of Aleppo and the attacks in Kafr Batna.

Various anti-tank missiles have been used by both sides of the civil conflict. The Russian-supplied 9M133 Kornet anti-tank missiles have been used extensively against the opposition forces. The United States, on the other hand, collaborated with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to supply the anti-Assad forces with the BGM-71 TOW anti-tank missiles to counter the firepower of the Russian-made 9M133 Kornet. The United States also played a crucial role in the supply of various 9K111 Fagot warheads from Eastern Europe to the anti-government factions (Dicker, 2017). The use of such military weapons only acted to showcase the scale of the war and how much it was covered by the media as well as the international community.

#### The Timeline of the Syrian Civil War

This section will present a systematic infographic that illustrates the timeline of the Syrian Civil War to date. Understanding this will be crucial to the proper contextualization of the reactions and the rationale of the Twitter users to the hashtag, #SyrianRefugees.

*Figure 1: Illustrating the timeline of the Syrian Civil War to date*



### The International Reactions and Humanitarian Efforts

Any conflict of a similar magnitude to the Syrian Civil War is subject to the attention of the international community. There are certain moderations that are required, especially when governments engage with the protesting citizens. In most, if not all, cases

unarmed civilians are supposed to be suppressed using lighter approaches such as tear gas or high-pressure water. However, this was not the case in Syria as the government used a violent response to the protests at the beginning of the war. The violent protests were a direct infringement of the citizens' freedom of speech and assembly (Cooper, 2018). As such, the United Nations, the Arab League, and the European Union expressed their strong concerns regarding the manner in which the government handled the protests and disregarded the rights of the citizens. Noteworthy, the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation suspended Syria's membership after the Assad government refused to stop the use of strong military action against protesters. At the onset of the use of the violence against the protesters, most of the nations within the Middle East showed strong support to the Assad government (Jones, 2018). As the death toll rose, these countries opted for a more neutral position that castigated the use of violent measures from both the retaliating protesters and the offending government.

With the magnitude of the war and the global attention that it received in both social media and the traditional media, a lot of humanitarian aid were put in place to alleviate the losses. The United Nations, for instance, requisitioned close to \$6.5 billion to support the humanitarian efforts during the Syrian Civil War (Villanova University, 2018). This figure is the largest amount ever spent by the United Nations in a single humanitarian campaign in history, which shows the magnitude of the crisis in Syria. Delivering basic necessities like food and medical care to the affected civilians was challenging in terms of logistics. As a case in point, the United Nations managed to provide food to only 304 out of an estimated 212,000 Syrians who were besieged by either the opposition forces or the government forces. The humanitarian efforts of the



United Nations were all coordinated by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), which is guided by the provisions of the 46/182 resolution of the UN General Assembly.

Despite the active role of the United States in the armament and financial support of the opposition forces in Syria, USAID has been in the front line in the humanitarian efforts in the civil war. Through USAID, the United States has overseen the requisition and supply of crucial materials like medical supplies, food, water, temporary shelters for the displaced, and education supplies in most of the affected regions of Syria.

#### *Media coverage of the Syrian Civil War*

Arguably, the Syrian Civil War is one of the most documented conflicts in history. This can be attributed to the factors that have sparked media coverage and overall global attention. The intensity of the information shared across the globe has been heightened by various social media platforms. The number of subscribers to the social media platforms has seen exponential growth in recent years. This increase can be attributed to the reduction in the cost of internet connection as well as the increasing availability of affordable smartphones for users across the globe. As such, any sort of information shared in these platforms is subject to spread relatively quickly compared to traditional forms of media. For this reason, information about the Syrian crisis has overshadowed all other civil altercations that occurred in different eras.

#### *Social media*

Social media has revolutionized the spread of information across the globe. While the exchange of media is relatively fast, social media enjoys several advantages that have made it the favorite media outlet for most people in the world today. Ideally, the

widespread use of various social media platforms has revolutionized how media is consumed globally.

Today, close to 50 percent of internet users and subscribers acknowledge that they hear about recent news as well as other trending topics through the internet platforms like Twitter and Facebook (Burge, 2017). This happens minutes or even hours before the same information is available on traditional media outlets like the print media and television. Numerous Web users across the globe will see the breaking stories on social media platforms and click on links that redirect them to websites for additional information. In most cases, social media platforms usually offer snippets of the news in question. Following the redirecting power of social media, several mainstream media houses like BBC, CNN, and Al Jazeera have invested heavily in their social media platforms and their news websites (Briggs, Soderlund, & Najem, 2017).

It is noteworthy that there has been a significant decline in the amount of information to which a given online user is exposed. This is attributed to the structure of social media platforms in which the information from third party links always appears as snippets. The snippets are crucial as they inform an online user of the information that is contained in the link. As such, most social media users will simply look through their newsfeed and discover news content yet simply read the overarching snippets or watch a short video of the situation in question (Castellano, 2015). On average, a typical social media user will just peruse an article for 15 seconds or less and the normal video watch time online is 10 seconds. In some cases, the video time can be reduced significantly depending on the quality of internet speed. In essence, users in countries with slower internet connections have challenges viewing the videos, thus reducing their exposure. To

mitigate this possibility, most social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Twitch use relatively shorter videos to accommodate users with slower internet speeds (Çakmak, 2017). Additionally, the users are allowed to adjust the quality of the videos to meet their internet speed potentials or limits.

Be that as it may, the social media platforms as well as the circles that users are exposed to will determine the news that they experience. Through the network of friends on Facebook or followers in Twitter, one becomes easily influenced by the actions and reactions of others. On Twitter, for instance, a post that is retweeted more will have a greater possibility of being noticed on the platform. Additionally, hashtags that are used by several Twitter users are most likely to trend (Deslandes, Mourlon, & Tribout, 2017). In the case of the refugee crisis in Syria, several Twitter users voiced their opinions using #Syrianrefugees making it a trending topic for days. Social stages have a power over what news and data we see. In other social media platforms like Facebook, posts or news with more likes and shares are likely to reach more people and attract curious online browsers. As such, online communities have power over what news pieces one can see and those that can be suppressed on the social media platforms (Castellano, 2015).

One major setback in the use of social media for the purposes of news information is the credibility of the information. Most users in social media circles have the unregulated freedom to post whatever information they desire within the platform's communication frameworks. As such, rumors as well as fake news have defined social media platforms in recent years. There are thousands of "fake news" sites and blogs that vie for the attention of social media users using exciting features and absurd storylines that will capture the curiosity of the online community (Hoffman, Weiss, & Egeland,

2018). With captivating headlines, users will typically click on the links only to be disappointed with the results. The upsurge in fake news websites can be attributed to the increased commercialization of the internet space. The modus operandi behind this concept is evident by the number of advertisements that grace virtually all the fake news websites. Once a social media user is duped into redirecting to the fake news websites, he or she will view the advertisements and if one is clicked, the owners of the fake news sites cash in (Katan, 2017). Based on the captivating nature of their headlines as well as the sharing rate, accessing fake news in most social media platforms today has become easier.

### The Syrian Refugee Crisis

The number of Syrian refugees is constantly rising as Syrian nationals consider living in other friendlier countries for their security. In this regard, therefore, this section will present a comprehensive overview on some of the core reasons that motivate the refugee crisis in Syria.

#### *No signs of ceasefire*

Over the years, the situation in Syria has failed to show any signs of a ceasefire despite the number of international interventions pushing for peace and order in the country. Following this reality, more and more Syrians are fleeing the country in search of safer havens in neighboring countries. On the other hand, Syrian refugees in other countries lose hope of returning to their homeland as the situation gets worse by the day. The battling is escalating in all districts and the economy and political administrations are facing a rather irreversible decline following the adverse impacts of the war (Ismail, The rule of violence : subjectivity, memory and government in Syria, 2018). This is driving

yet more individuals to leave, but at the same time, it is profoundly affecting the individuals who have sought asylum in the neighboring nations. At the point when individuals escape from war, they generally do so with the hope of returning to their homes as soon as possible.

Out of patriotism and the comfort of being home, it is usually a daily dream for a Syrian refugee to return home as soon as peace prevails. This reason is behind the settlement patterns of the refugees. In most cases, the refugees prefer living along the borders next to their homelands for their own convenience in the event the war ends. Additionally, this gives them an easy way to occasionally cross back to their countries to check on their properties and the level of damage, if any (Erlach, 2016). The Syrian war has shown an upward trajectory in both social and structural damage and virtually all the alternatives used for ceasefire have yielded negative results. It is for this reason that most of the Syrian refugees have lost hope in ever returning to their homeland. Most of their homes have been overrun by the intensive military operations, international air strikes, and looting. With nothing left, and the existing refugee camps running out of resources due to congestion, a huge number of individuals are currently prepared to travel a lot farther for more comfortable asylum zones.

#### *Living as a refugee impedes the economic potential of Syrian refugees*

Living as a refugee in a neighboring country is associated with a variety of commercial setbacks. Typically, most refugees lack permits to work in the host countries so as to fend for their families. After the war intensified, most Syrians sought safety with their relatives who were living in neighboring nations like Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt, Turkey, and Jordan. Of those who did not have relatives to accommodate them, some rented out

tiny apartments where several Syrians live in deplorable conditions and cost-share the rent (Matar & Kadri, 2018). Still, most of the Syrian refugees were unable to sustain rentals because of lack of reasonable employment opportunities to account for minimum basic needs. As a result, many displaced people face expulsion from their residences in the host countries, which has aggravated the mental and emotional state of the exiles. In many nations, the exiles are not permitted to secure employment and when they do manage to secure jobs, they usually get odd jobs with unfair contracts. Due to desperation and the ambition to survive the harsh era, most Syrians—regardless of their qualifications—find themselves doing odd casual jobs in the border towns of Lebanon, Iraq, and Turkey (Malek, Home That Was Our Country, The : A Memoir of Syria, 2018). Most of the host countries have strict policies that ensure job opportunities are secured for their nationals first. An influx of refugees will mean increased competition for the limited job slots in the countries. In Jordan, for instance, Syrian refugees are forced to sign an agreement not to work or they face the risk of being returned to the refugee camps, which are defined by strained resources and curtailed opportunities for social and commercial growth. The situation is the same in Lebanon, where displaced persons are compelled to sign a vow not to work on the off chance that they wish to reestablish their residency status. Without pay and investments, the Syrian refugees are constrained when it comes to meeting their needs and providing for their dependents. This strain pushes the immigrants to exhaust their savings without any form of capital inflow. In the long run, their savings get depleted and the Syrian refugees are resigned to accumulating debts that further affect their financial status. The cycle will lead to their inability to pay the debts

and ultimately force them to auction off the few properties they managed to salvage from the war.

*Insufficient global aid to meet the needs of the Syrian refugees*

Normally, persons displaced due to war and apolitical instabilities would receive aid from the UNHCR, which runs numerous projects to enable them to survive the typically harsh environments of the refugee camps. However, the magnitude as well as the number of years of the Syrian Civil War has posed numerous challenges in the allocation of aid to the refugees. As such, sourcing funds to facilitate aid over those years is a challenging feat for the United Nations as well as other agencies like USAID (Abboud, 2018). When the number of Syrian evacuees increased due to the sieges and intensified military operations, most of the displaced persons fled to Europe. With this influx of refugees into the European nations, the UNHCR received several aid pledges from most European nations, easing its burden for the benefits of the Syrian refugees (Díaz, 2018). Despite the global appeal for aiding the Syrian refugees, the crisis is still underfunded. As a result of the diminishing aid fund in most humanitarian agencies, entities like the World Food Program have reduced their aid in most Syrian refugee camps. As a result of the reduced aid, thousands of refugees have resorted to various survival tactics like child labor and doing odd jobs. The situation is worse in countries like Jordan, where numerous displaced people have likewise lost free access to social insurance. Practically 60% of adults with incessant conditions are presently compelled to get by without medical prescriptions (Samer, 2017). This figure has risen exponentially from 23% in 2014. The displaced Syrians seeking refuge in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt claim that these cuts have left them living below the poverty line.

### *Stagnated education among young scholars*

The importance of education in the world today cannot be underscored. In some circles, education is considered as a basic need and hence every child is entitled to education as a basic right. The war in Syria disrupted the basic social structure; the destruction of various learning institutions hindered most children's continued study (Spyer, 2018). Additionally, the war resulted in increased insecurities that instilled fear among the students, such that they could not attend school comfortably.

Most of the displaced persons in Syria fled to neighboring countries with the hope that their lives would resume normalcy, but matters were not any different when it came to education. For those who fled to host countries like Egypt, Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon, the acceptance rate for the Syrian students was relatively low. As a result, close to 90,000 Syrian students had to put a temporary or permanent stop to their academics (Dukhan, 2018). Following the harsh living conditions in the refugee camps, close to 20% of the students dropped out of school completely, substituting their academics with child labor. The rationale for their choice was to survive longer by earning any form of income given that admission into the foreign schools was rather challenging. Many young women are missing out on formal education in the wake of being forced into early marriage—another survival instrument that most Syrian females prefer. In marriage, either premature or arranged, the young Syrian women prefer this approach as men would provide for their needs and hence an easier survival. Indeed, even in Lebanon, where the young Syrian scholars are accorded free education opportunities, the cost of transportation from the camps to the nearby learning institutions is relatively high and most parents prefer having their children stay at the camps instead (Shaley, 2018). In



Lebanon alone, more than 200,000 Syrian children fail to go to school due to the cost and reliability of transport. For the Syrian refugees living outside the refugee camps in Jordan, the Jordanian government requires them to apply and pay for new identity documents at a cost of 27 Euros, something that most displaced Syrians cannot afford (Smith, 2017). Emphasis should be put on the education of Syrian students. Following the social, economic, and structural destruction of the country by war, a major reconstruction will be inevitable when, God willing, the war ends. It is the educated and skilled persons who will be on the frontline in the reconstruction process. In this regard, therefore, the importance of educating the Syrian refugees in both the formal and the informal sectors cannot be underscored.

*Strain on host nations hosting millions of refugees without adequate international aid*

In normal circumstances, most sovereign nations budget for their citizens every year. The effective allocation of the budget ensures that all social amenities and resources are used effectively in tandem with the national planning objectives. In the event of the abrupt influx of refugees, the national budget will be strained as it works to accommodate the displaced persons. In such cases, legislative authorities could establish emergency budgets that accommodate the refugees. However, sustaining such budgets is relatively challenging because most countries offer public services to the citizens and foreigners who pay taxes. The tax income creates a common pool that sustains such services. So, in a bid to sustain the overstretched budgets due to the accommodation of the refugees, most host countries would appeal for international aid.

It is important to note that most of Syria's neighboring nations have not adjusted for the immense refugee populace influx, which has put a gigantic strain on their

operational and social frameworks. With the lack of sufficient local funding as well as the international donations to accommodate the millions of Syrian refugees, most host countries have resorted to measures that tend to handle the situation. Small as it is, Lebanon is host to millions of Syrian refugees who have caused a serious dent in the country's economy and the resource allocation per person. Thus, the Lebanese legislature has established various measures to discourage most Syrian refugees from considering Lebanon as an ideal destination. Specifically, Lebanon only admits displaced persons who are in transit to other countries like Turkey. For a person to enter Lebanon, he or she is supposed to provide a valid air or ferry ticket to Turkey and specify the duration his or her stay in Lebanon before seeking asylum in Turkey (Yildiz & Keengwe, 2016). Now, evacuees in Lebanon must pay approximately \$130 every year to remain and sign an agreement not to work in Lebanon. These harsh conditions make it difficult for the Syrian refugees to choose Lebanon as their idyllic place of solace as they await the war to end in Syria. In Jordan, the administration requires all Syrians living outside the refugee camps to get new identification documents in a bid to access governmental services. Securing these documents is not only tedious but requires almost 27 Euros, which is unaffordable to most Syrian refugees given the economic status that has befallen their country.

#### The Media Image of Europe's Un-accommodative Immigration Policies

In recent years, European countries have been in the spotlight regarding their immigration policies. Through social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram as well as the mainstream media, Syrians inside and outside the nation eagerly pursue the news for information regarding the immigration situation in Europe (Shoup, 2018). Various news outlets cover the challenging and troublesome transit of immigrants across the

Mediterranean and through the Balkans ending in Austria and Germany. Despite the challenges in the traveling, these immigrants are usually welcomed in these safer countries and with better opportunities.

For Syrians, the possibility that they could seek shelter in a nation like Germany and Austria, which offer a blend of security, work prospects, and training, merited the risks that they faced in the risky crossing of the Mediterranean Sea. Ergo, the displaced Syrians feel a sense of urgency to travel to these countries before the opportunity expires.

Clearly, all impacted nations must advance their endeavors to end the Syrian war. In any case, until there is harmony, the nations that are facilitating and accommodating the nearly 4 million refugees must get the necessary resources to facilitate the hosting process. They must also assist in funding the UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations to cater to the needs of the immigrants, while the global community pushes for work plans to enable displaced people to procure and add to neighborhood work markets. In the meantime, refugees must be offered increasingly legitimate roads to achieve security in the planet's wealthier nations through expanded resettlement numbers, progressively adaptable family reunification plans, and compassionate and understudy visas. Syrian exiles would then reconsider before leaving and taking a chance with their lives on a voyage to Europe.

#### Representation of the #SyrianRefugeesCrisis through Photography

The role that pictures play in the presentation of certain information is very crucial. Ideally, the manner and context in which certain pictures are presented tend to spark various emotions and reactions. The coverage of the #SyrianRefugeesCrisis through photography portrays the Western media's stand over the matter. Media houses

across the globe use photographs to develop stories as they happen. Therefore, this section will present a comprehensive analysis of the role played by photography in reporting the Syrian Civil War.

As a form of visual media, the ability of pictures alone to replicate the emotional appeal of the people in Syria is not enough to spark a trend on the situation in Syria. A greater portion of the photographs taken during the Syrian refugees' crisis was shared across social media platforms. Such platforms tend to accelerate the emotional appeal of the people who interact with them. In this manner, various governments as well as the humanitarian organizations took up the matter through their official social media platforms alongside the coverage of the mainstream media (Matveev, 2018). Critically, this mostly occurs through the commitment of professional news photographers, amateur footage from witnesses or volunteers, and the displaced people themselves. Ideally, these sources have different levels of accuracy and emotional appeal.

Since the start of the conflict in Syria, there has been a significant shift in the emotional appeal from a more sympathetic stance to apathy. This shift is attributed to the influence of the Western media outlets and their reporting of the crisis, especially through pictures on their social media platforms. Their expressed commitment and backing give another side of the story that, in most cases, is usually framed to align with the needs of the media houses. In truth, numerous picture takers have assumed a pivotal job, as is evident in the picture of Alan Kurdi that was taken by Nilufer Demir. She Demir posted the photograph on the internet. Following the prominent networks associated with the social media platforms, the emotional photo was grabbed by news sources and appeared on basically all front pages (Zwier, 2018). The prominence that the image received in

both print and social media is attributed to the fact that Nilufer Demir did not bother to protect the intellectual rights of the photograph (Abouzeid, 2018). As such, anyone, including the media houses, could reproduce the image across various platforms. This was similar to the situation of the image of Omran Daqneesh taken by photojournalist Mahmoud Raslan.

Photographs are a piece of a societal construct that expects to accumulate emotional support and action, but such outcomes are not guaranteed. Ergo, photographs taken to elicit certain reactions tend to be subjected to criticism and analysis, which forms the foundation for alienation and arguments about the position of other nations regarding the refugees' crisis in Syria. The photographers in such cases choose to manage observers yet dismiss the interest to be the core target and propose to change reality. For certain photographers, the issue of movement and shelter to Europe had an individual undertone, since they themselves were outcasts or offspring of haven searchers (Varghese, 2013). Through photography, the world received a multi-perspective view of the refugee situation in Syria. Several photographers in the region—both amateurs and professionals—captured photos that formed the basis of reporting. The pictures were shared across social media platforms and sparked debates across the globe. In this regard, therefore, the role of photographs as media elements in the Syrian refugees' crisis cannot be underscored.

#### Western Countries Reaction' to the Refugee Crisis on Social Media

The refugees' crisis is one of the biggest global concerns in the world today. Ideally, nations across the world are addressing the enormous crisis of displaced persons and its amplified need for urgent attention. Despite the gravity of the matter, it seems as if

most of the abled nations across the world lack empathy. This is evident in the relatively low number of countries that have taken interest in ensuring that the Syrian situation is mitigated. Very few countries have honored their pledge to donate to the UN and other charitable organizations to help the matter (Markusen, 2018). As such, the UNCHR efforts to handle the situation has been curtailed by the ever straining and diminishing budgets for the displaced persons.

Citing dangers to national security, monetary and political strain, and social security, most governments across the globe have established policies that have pushed the refugees further to the border peripheries. The governments have also made it difficult for asylum seekers to apply for refuge. As such, international humanitarian bodies like the UNCHR have found it challenging to resettle refugees in the most strategic countries. Strategic settlement of refugees is essential as they will be better placed to relocate to Syria for reconstruction at the end of the war. Not all administrations have abandoned those escaping war and oppression. Turkey has housed about 1.8 million evacuees from Syria in the past 4 years; Jordan has taken in 600,000; most surprising of all, small Lebanon has gotten practically 1.2 million Syrians—about 25% of the nation's populace ( International Crisis Group, 2017).

In any case, these forefront nations, and others in Asia and Africa that have gotten extensive refugee populaces, are battling and have expanded confinements around the border lines. It is profoundly unexpected that well-off Western nations will not share the weight of the worldwide refugee emergency on grounds that hosting more displaced persons would compromise their strength and security. It is really disheartening that a

small country like Lebanon has strived beyond its means to ensure that a greater section of the Syrian refugees is accommodated.

### The Nature and Rationale of the Western Media Reporting

In this section the point will be to use the cases of various Western media platforms and how they handled the Syrian crisis. The frames used by the media houses will be categorized into either peace or war journalism. According to Armitage (2017), peace or harmony news coverage is a lot of refinements in the detailing of contention and a store of evaluative criteria for media observing and content investigation. Ergo, it is viewed as an appropriate hypothetical system for testing the theories of this examination and making generalized conclusions regarding various events. A few core guidelines will be taken up in this section as diagnostic apparatuses. Materials assembled through the media examination will be rethought using these instruments.

The first idea of peace or harmony reporting originates from the Johan Galtung school of thought (Baczko, Dorronsoro, & Quesnay, 2018). Galtung built up a hypothetical system of two inverse ideas—peace reporting and war reporting. Through collaboration with Mari Holmboe Ruge, Galtung built his original set of presumptions on the theme around the key variables of newsworthiness in the predominant press news of global clashes. Through their propositions and recommendations, Galtung and Ruge demonstrated the recently referenced gatekeeping to be an orderly procedure.

Understanding the gatekeeping framework is crucial in media studies. Ideally, various gatekeeping choices make a discernible pattern of exclusion and consideration. This pattern is defined by five core criteria. The first criterion is the news threshold that posits that an issue on everyone's mind is one that extremely affects the masses. The

second proponent is the frequency, entailing the set of events that fit well with the news agencies' expectations. Third, negativity covers the notion that reporting bad news solicits more reactions than good news (Heing, 2017). Unexpectedness, on the other hand, stresses the manner in which unique or rather extraordinary news become more attractive to the typical news audience. The last proponent is unambiguity, where the unclear events become more popular as compared to the direct or rather predictable news items.

While the threshold and the frequency variables are critical, they are generally associated with the business impetuses before media publications while making news. Particularly on TV, occasions and issues secured by media need to fit into the news cycles and be industrially manageable (Hoffman, Weiss, & Egeland, 2018). The limit criteria, in any case, is not without importance for this examination. According to Bennis (2018), peace newscasting finds a dependable balance by being inquisitive into how specific pieces of "reality" come to be "observed," while others are constantly disregarded. In this regard, news writers normally judge news thresholds, as per promptly recognizable shows, in prominently nationalistic terms. This argument contends that the Western media make a genuine case of the Western media being everywhere. It further alludes to the thought of nations, named as the West, which have close and conjugated outside and security approach intrigues that are reflected in what can be characterized as a vital story (Heing, 2017). This conjugation of world perspectives and comprehension of international strategy interests is consistently reflected in the manner in which the Syrian clash has been caught by the Western media houses like CNN and BBC.



The coverage as well as the standpoint of the media houses mirror NATO's international strategy interests in the Middle East and the circumstances on the ground. It is likewise for the Western readership and could be delineated as Western in birthplace and direction. There is a uniform and solidified base of suppositions and ideas all through the years of the Western media's coverage of the war in Syria. Essentially, the Western media houses news can be seen as a device for political motivators to broaden their impact, desires, and change the world in tandem with their beliefs.

An additional contention for this affirmation is the Western media's predisposition to officialdom as a hotspot for data, yet definitions and arguments which, as a matter of course, are maintained as impartial. The last three criteria additionally factor in the account development inside the coverage of the Syrian crisis by the Western media since its onset (Gowans, 2017). In the case of antagonism, there is a mindboggling inclination to disaster and brutality as unmistakable parts of the contention. Despite the fact that it may appear as uncontroversial and as regular methodology toward announcing a contention, there is a unbelievable focus on brutality, shadowing the basic unpredictability of the contention, which, as an outcome, is decreased only to its fierce indications (Chatty, 2018). It is Galtung's beginning reason that contentions are far beyond just viciousness. Based on the unexpectedness tenet, there is a degree of sway in the organization and consistency of news stories originating from Syria.

Articles are commonly, substantially more successive and the power of the accounts is discernable from the vicious arrangement of occasions occurring in Syria, which partially legitimizes the general comprehension of the Western media's stories as a clamor under the news coverage of connection philosophy. Unambiguity is evident where

the Syrian clash is overwhelmingly decreased to parallels of "us" and "them," "great" and "fiendishness," "exploited people" and "culprits," "freedom fighters" and "the imperious system;" the decrease of the quantity of groups engaged with the war Assad and the restriction; the West and the Russia-Iran-Syria pivot, and so on. The manner by which the conflict is described makes an impression of real and good unambiguity with the audience of the news—which comes at expense of improvement and triviality, now and again. Generally speaking, the majority of the variables of newsworthiness are recognizable and are critical in the endeavor to go in reverse in deconstructing the Western media's general account of the war in Syria. It is imperative to consider to what degree the media can create a pattern in which the audience follows ( International Crisis Group, 2017).

Ideally, peace reporting stands as a solution for this sort of predisposition, advancing harmony as an instrumental inclination, possibly improving writers' comprehension of contentions and their ability to cover them decently and precisely, while giving the peaceful motivation space in the open. In this regard, Western editors and correspondents should decide the stories that should be reported and the best way to report them, allowing the society everywhere to consider and value peaceful, formative reactions to strife.

Peace news coverage is without a doubt a regularizing purpose of flight for basic account investigation, yet a shrewd one in different capacities. The justification behind it is to support writers and news sources to investigate and grasp the multifaceted nature of conflicts. The thought and rationale behind it is to give stories more context and to instruct the audience to react in a certain manner that is best described through the media

house's frame. The objective is to bring more foundation to a story and to report what is going admirably, with the goal that individuals are better prepared to make a practical perspective on the world than that of customary emergency-situated newscasting (Abboud, 2018). Johan Galtung considered harmony to be conceivably transformative for journalistic moral code, yet in this paper, the significance of his discoveries serve as an explanatory device to investigate the manners in which contemporary wars are secured by broad communications. Galtung conceptualized harmony and war journalism as two contending account models for covering clashes.

With special reference to the civil war in Syria, peace news coverage is used as a focal point for basic story investigation. The idea of harmony reporting uncovers the degree to which clashes can be investigated in various ways. Basic story investigation using expository instruments uncovers the degree of the Western media as an issue of decision and cognizant article arrangement. Specifically, this section will consider the Western media's coverage of the Syrian clash using the first of four Galtung's tranquility news coverage doubles: harmony/strife versus war/brutality arranged reporting as depicted in the organizations such as FOX News, CNN, Sky News, and the BBC. Despite the fact that organizations like FOX News perceive the presence of numerous involved parties which are assembled in four bigger groups, it neglects to catch the general number of autonomous grouping and on-screen characters that participate in the war (Ismail, The rule of violence : subjectivity, memory and government in Syria, 2018). Most Western media organizations have distinguished four noteworthy interior on-screen characters (the Assad government, the Syrian resistance, ISIS and Kurds) and seek to streamline the unpredictable scene. This sort of speculation and rearrangement is not phenomenal; in

any case, it becomes dangerous when pursued by demographic profiling—a procedure through which groups of people are progressively homogenized and attributed with specific arrangements of personalities, qualities and practices. This creates motion-picture-like characters and endeavors to make them unsurprising and relatable to the audience (Erich, 2016). Additionally, there is a solid inclination to cover the war as simply a few separate clashes occurring, each including just different sides—Assad against the restriction, the West against ISIS, Turkey against Kurds, and so forth—to name only the most pervasive ones. As such, the multifaceted nature of the war is simplified by breaking the Syrian clash into a couple of definite units that include two groups battling about a particular issue. The excellent two-party strife is seen in the Syrian resistance's battle for opportunity and majority rules system against a fierce system, which is an overarching story in Western media platforms like CNN. Meanwhile, the worldwide war against psychological warfare is a primary subjacent account. The hidden assumption is that the resistance and Assad have an incongruent objective—the thrashing of the opposite side and continuing or assuming responsibility for Syria. This places the Western media community stories a lot closer to the viciousness-orientated newscasting worldview.

It is essential to acknowledge that even the two sides that Western media chiefly puts at the front of its news coverage, do not decide their interests, positions and conduct only toward one another, yet rotate in an increasingly intricate coordination framework. Additionally, there is a need to problematize the term “Syrian resistance” as an umbrella idea that has no solid stand—the groups that fall under the term position themselves on such a wide spectrum of interests and characters that is ostensibly inappropriate to

integrate them as one solitary on-screen character (Jones, 2018). Using terms as moderate and outrageous restriction does not do what's needed to relieve this issue. The issue for the war has been predetermined as Assad and has been firmly customized. The Western media's comprehension of the contention depends on its unmistakable signs and is processed into a content that is seldom deserted. It uses terms and classes, for example, "despot" and "guerillas" to illuminate its readership's comprehension of the contention, without being exact on what these terms and classifications really mean. Such words tend to favor one side. Western media outlets comprehension of the contention moves inside a given spectrum. The start of the conflict is very much characterized and can be followed to a particular date and occasion. In spite of the fact that there is a current feeling of an intermediary war and of provincial overflow impacts from and to Syria, the war is Syria's problem. There is little to no assessment of the profound underlying foundations of the conflict that are examined toward the start of the investigation and no understanding at all of auxiliary and social brutality as the drivers of war (Dukhan, 2018). The substance examination has found a solid feeling of "us versus them" portrayal, where the West is unequivocally distinguished through the Syrian restriction's motivation. There is a common conclusion of who the "heroes" are, while "they" are viewed as an issue. The Western media's conceptualization of "us" and "them," as unfortunate casualties and oppressors, successfully limits the space for arrangements and bargaining. The way of newscasting of connection is shown in the enthusiastic connection to specific on-screen characters as sole unfortunate casualties in the contention. As a result, this dehumanizes the "other" and fortifies the threat between the tangled sides. Additionally, there is an obvious spotlight on brutality and its unmistakable impacts. There is a disparity between

the volume of coverage of direct savagery, barbarities and killings and the news of harmony endeavors, just as the imperceptible impacts of brutality. Like ends made about the Iraq war, there is no coverage of basic and social brutality; there is no accounting of post-horrible pressure issue and returning warriors; there are no tales about harm done to families and the interruption of the customary lifestyle, disturbed instruction, results of obliterated framework, access to nourishment and restorative supplies, access to culture or the upset exercise of religion. Furthermore, the investigation considers the Western media's stories against reality versus publicity-orientated twofold. The Western media raises rehashed statements of purposeful publicity and untruthfulness essentially originating from Assad's and Russian systems' media.

The Western media's feeling of newsworthiness referenced above and exceptionally uniform method for revealing the Syrian clash are, nonetheless, not given same sort of examination (Lister, 2017). This emphatically identifies with an apparent nonappearance of any difficulties to the story of the Syrian clash and a solid tendency toward officialdom. As such, this decides the degree to which the presentation and pondering of the Syrian clash have been founded on particular, opinionated and, eventually, uneven sourcing. Varying stances and endeavors to pass on various symbolism and comprehension of the contention have been disregarded by most Western media organizations. There is no reference to the Western writers who have been giving various contributions from Syria.

Moral delegitimization is at last used as a device to save the setup account, as one of the parts of the news coverage of connection approach. Peace newscasting holds media to a higher standard of testing the common stories, destroys officialdom's inclination to

diminish dependence to official definitions and data as a solitary wellspring of media content (Saleh, 2017). All sides in the contention ought to be considered responsible for the manner in which the intended respondents react to the situation that is being reported. The consistent criticizing of Russia or Assad for dispersing Syrians in the war shows an inclined story that will most likely spark a given threat of belief. In a general sense, the analysis of talk of fault is a scholarly supplication for hostile to fundamental and against essentialist beginning stages. Galtung's third pair problematizes the distinction between individual-orientated and first class-orientated reporting. To this point, the general end is that the Western media's coverage of the Syrian clash is firmly first class-orientated. All parties are spoken to through their group heads this being most unequivocally reflected in the news of the government on-screen character in general. In Western media's news coverage, Assad is not only a political pioneer and leader before one of the beset parties, he is a solid image of against Western qualities, fierceness and autocracy. From the beginning of the contention, Assad is the epitome of fiendishness and "them." ISIS was, as referenced, given the face in the character of Jihadi John who has been installed with emblematic centrality.

Despite what might be expected, there are no equivalent solid characters who speak to the Syrian restriction or Kurds who are described as unfortunate casualties. Naming all pioneers would add to the feeling of responsibility for wrongdoings and compassionate law infringement among all groups. Wrongdoings and monstrosities directed by the resistance-related groups are covered as confined cases or not covered at all. This creates a feeling of relativism. Furthermore, detailing of harmony endeavors is centered on world class harmony producers. This is one of the central focuses between

the two ideal models conceptualized by Galtung. As indicated by the harmony reporting and individuals-orientated methodology, it is basic to cover and offer voice to grassroots harmony motivating forces, or interreligious discourse. This is associated with the forward of the doubles: arrangement versus triumph orientated news coverage. It dismisses the fundamental endeavors when a truce understanding is agreed upon. To be sure, it endeavors to make harmony an occasion and give it a date (Lister, 2017). This is applicable to the manner in which Western media cover harmonious endeavors, as indicated by the substance investigation at the end of the previous section. The significance of this is twofold: First, there is a need to make open space for talking about the proposition for struggle change and harmony making; second, there is a similar need to go beyond the ability to comprehend harmony through truce, triumph, or harmony bargain. In spite of the fact that reports of global peace endeavors are not quiet, they are focused on intergovernmental discretionary arrangements, not potential arrangements and space for strife change. Harmony summits and dealings reports are centered on who said what, and not the substance of harmony proposition or ways for adding to the discourse and open comprehension of preconditions for harmony.

Ergo, the Western media's news coverage depends on what Galtung recognized as war news coverage. In light of the majority of the references above, there is a solid tendency of the Western media's publications to empower an open comprehension of the Syrian clash, which is war-fueling on a very basic level, and fundamentally reveals the outlets as an all-inclusive political device for execution of authority governments' remote and security plans.



Dicker (2017) recognized six far-powering claims that are a fundamental piece of post-9/11 news about the Middle East, which are important for breaking down how Western media shape open recognition over international strategy themes identified with Middle East. Katan (2017) described these as complicity of Western media in guaranteeing open help for military intercessions abroad. This examination will review these cases and break down them with regards to Western media's coverage of the Syrian clash. The research led in the primary part has identified numerous reports from Syria fortifying this feeling of direct peril originating from the occasions from Syria. Two of the most evident components of this feeling of defenselessness are shown in the media coverage of the relocation inflows and various psychological oppressor assaults that occurred in the initial six years of the Syrian clash. Movement from Syria and the Middle East everywhere is secured as a relocation emergency, not exclusively because of the degree of mainstream movement and interior uprooting, which truly sums to a philanthropic emergency; yet vagrants are also seen as risk to European strength and lifestyle (Markusen, 2018). The supposed relocation emergency has been a point of convergence of European legislative issues since the start of the war, and media outlets have covered it accordingly. Psychological oppressor assaults led by ISIS that occur on European and American soil have additionally been a crucial part of the general story of the Syrian clash. Danger from ISIS's psychological warfare has been emblematically associated with the Syrian clash and overflowed to how different parties participating in the contention are perceived. In addition, coverage of the contention has been somewhat involved in imparting the idea of how the contention in Syria influences not just Western vital outside and security enthusiasm for the Middle East, but also inner legislative issues

in the Western nations, notwithstanding the physical remoteness from Syria and moderately low degree of direct impact to overall population. General end is one lopsided inclusion of the contention that is in contrast with the certified danger to Western social orders. Coverage of authoritarian territories and worldwide entertainers and their administration authority contributes to how a global alliance is perceived as having a typical position on the contention. In spite of some of on-screen characters having unmistakable and separated enthusiasm for the contention, the prominence of the Western media's media coverage is on how Western positions are in contrast from the remainder of the universal network. Common contrasts among the US, Turkey and Saudi Arabia are limited and potential ambiguities are minimized, while the shared interests between the Western interests and Russian and Iranian positions are complemented. Worldwide and provincial on-screen characters' shared conviction on issues, for example, battle against fear-based oppression, safeguarding regional trustworthiness of Syria, ensuring social legacy is underestimated.

The Western media puts most of its effort into giving proof of ghastly wrongdoings that were committed by the Syrian head of state. He is emblematically developed as "malevolent" and the absolute most significant culprit of brutality and barbarity occurring in Syria by using different representative and logical instruments, some of which have just been recognized and examined, and some to be discussed in the following section.

There is a tendency from the Western media to introduce the harmony endeavors as inadequate and not advantageous (Phillips, 2017). In the newscasting of connection approach, media outlets frequently spread harmony endeavors so as to impart the

inadequacy of conciliatory methods in refereeing and harmony-making and to develop open discernment that diverse methodology should be received. In view of the collection of coverage accumulated, there is sufficient proof to guarantee that some arrangement of giving an account of harmony endeavors is required for proposing more grounded military contribution and military mediation in Syria, as in the past instances of Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya (Jones, 2018). This is shown in rehashed claims that not doing what is needed is at least compliancy. Bit by bit, the Western media's account of the Syrian clash expands its support for the duty to secure through reporting. This is unmistakably observable around the occasions and periods of the contention that have been distinguished as occasions conveying the most grounded representation of noteworthiness; for example, asserted use of compound weapons, destruction of social legacy ensured under UNESCO, and the fight for Aleppo.

While the regulating segment of the obligation to safeguard should be sincere, this sort of account has a noticeable and significant element of support of accidental paternalism. The elements of the contention are secured as direct movement into increasing savagery. Balanced news of red lines drawn by US organizations and the nonappearance of more grounded military contribution in light of what is happening in Syria seem to propose a US military mediation. Obama was condemned as powerless, reluctant, and latent. To this point, Western media's stories have been increasingly hawkish pieces of Western political foundations that are far from the motivating forces that the harmony reporting advocates propose and progressively conservative pieces of political range contending for harmony by serene methods. Ostensibly, there is proof of relative satisfaction with the six "war-energizing" claims made. As a result, it is sensible

to raise the idea of Western media publications having some contribution in pushing for an interventionist motivation after seeking a methodology characterized as war-reporting by Galtung. This consequently decreases the West's capacity to convey various aspects of the contention and its ability to seek after a more delicate methodology. The media outlets' capacity to ponder some of the news coverage's obvious roles is obstructed by the solid spotlight on brutality and legislative issues (Armitage, 2017).

A portion of the duties in which the Western media outlets have failed to meet expectations covering the Syrian clash include:

- Channeling correspondence—The Western media neglected to hold onto its potential job as a middle person for correspondence between groups engaged with the war both inside and remotely. Media have the ability to lessen exchange expenses of arranging, particularly given the mediatization of the Syrian clash. The Western media could have been progressively occupied with advising open information about the authentic foundation of the Syrian clash, including the interests of the different sides and increasingly evolved instead of embracing one explicit story and variant of truth. This is likewise identified with certainty building, where reporting can be seen as having the capability of diminishing doubt among affected sides and adding to common comprehension and certainty as preconditions for arranging.
- Besides, the harmony news coverage approach has the potential for amending misperceptions. By appealing to the other side in the contention and receiving its story, The Economist has rather added to fortification of open misperceptions and generalizations about Syria. It has added to the dehumanization of one side, while

all the while misleading the opposite side—blocking the procedure where arrangements are dependent on shared trust and great confidence. Rather than demanding one group's complaints and recognizing the other as the culprit, it is fundamental to impart a comprehension of the two groups' complaints, interests, and needs. Rather than simply strengthening the talk of complaints and irreconcilable differences, strife touchy news coverage keeps away from incendiary news and considers arrangements. Complete dehumanization and vilification of any party successfully averts dealings in compliance with common decency with that on-screen character. In view of the substance examination part of the investigation, there is little proof of the Western media's pledge to struggle affectability and receiving harmony reporting standards, which in reality puts its coverage a lot nearer to the war news coverage worldview.

Generalizations in this section are seen as support of oversimplified portrayals and the use of these surely understood emblematic portrayals inspires a feeling of commonality with the audience. It means developing emblematic relations among occasions and entertainers that are not normally associated with legitimacy. All through the principal part of this section, which managed exact research of the Western media's articles about the Syrian clash, there were numerous examples where use of generalizations were distinguished and hailed as significant devices for account development. Generalizations are understood as markers of good charge, emblematic and with social reverberation. Here is a rundown of some of the occasions where the Western media used generalizations:

- Comparing Assad and his dad Hafez to the Italian mafia/Corleone family. This attempted to portray Assad's method for administering Syria as an obscure privately-run company, running the nation on premise of individual associations and family unions and indirect access adjustments and killings.
- Evoking Ramadan 2011 as an open door for change and purifying.
- Using the case of youngsters playing with firearm toys as an image of developing social irreverence. This is aimed at creating the feeling that every degree of society, even kids, is befouled by the Assad system; also proposing that weapon toys are imported from China, who, like Russia, hinders the Western harmony endeavors in the UN Security Council. This makes a connection between the social debauchery into viciousness and the job of Russia and China.
- The idea of a red line for political and military activities that cannot be universally entered.
- Kurds as absurdly obstinate especially in disclosing their reluctance to join the Syrian resistance's push to topple Assad.
- Comparing Putin to a scorpion in the tale of scorpion and a frog, which intends to show Putin as innately insidious and not reliable as an arrangement accomplice.
- Historical analogies fill a comparative need. They include contrasting an incident from the present and what may give off the impression of being its partner previously.

These are recognized as being evoked by the Western media to suggest a feeling of past experiences and to oversee discernments by crediting them with a feeling of recognition. They serve a comparative capacity as cliché pictures and portrayal, yet

depend on genuine verifiable establishment (Pearlman, We crossed a bridge and it trembled : voices from Syria, 2018). Authentic analogies suggest biased ends and overemphasized likenesses. Here are a portion of the authentic analogies distinguished in the Western media's news focus:

- Comparison of the partisan divide and insecurity of Syria to Iraq—paralleling why military intercession may proceed the start of the genuine clash—yet additionally underscoring the way that interceding in Syria may convey the danger of long and unusual military association without a reasonable leave procedure.
- Comparison of Damascus, the Syrian capital, with the Romanian capital Bucharest under Ceausescu—as an image of pre-innovation and dismissal of the Western lifestyle and neoliberal private enterprise.
- Comparisons of Assad to Qaddafi in evoking the toppling of a pioneer by fierce methods—with a solid positive undertone; focus on Assad's Alawite foundation to make evident the closeness of Assad to Iran as one of the rebel states and as an image of hostility to advancement. There is no recorded reason for such an emblematic association. Verifiably, Alawites have not had much religious partiality toward Iranian Shiites (Abouzeid, 2018). They are an autochthonous religious and ethnic group living in Syria close by Sunnis—in addition, they are ethnic Arabs, while Iranians are not. They are one of the most moderate Muslim groups, opposite to customary Sunni and Shia groups. This relationship among Iran and Alawites is in the capacity of demonization.

- Evoking the Munich understanding from 1938 to suggest exchanges as an indication of shortcoming and good capitulation that accompanies working with the underhanded. Progressively fearless activities are inferred as an important arrangement. Contrasting Aleppo with Grozny, Guernica, Dresden, Sarajevo and the decimation in Rwanda to make a feeling of nature and good unambiguity. Concerning the controls of statistical data points, the creator of this examination has demonstrated occurrences of the free use of figures in the substance investigation part of this examination. However, there is no solid confirmation to help the idea of far-reaching control of statistical data points. Generally speaking, the substance investigation and the basic account examination have mostly confirmed the precision of this particular speculation.

The Western media's story of the Syrian clash ostensibly fits into this long history of digressive consistency and faith in Western exceptionalism and the need to acculturate the "other." Some of the recently referenced parts of the Western media's media coverage feed into this sort of reasoning and single comprehension of truth. One of them is the disparaging component of the obligation to secure talk, not as far as the lawful convention, yet as far as repeating the comprehension of different nations worldwide and their political onscreen characters as youthful and needing assistance.

The following focuses identify how this verbose consistency is protected and safeguarded by using talk of fault to introduce Western understanding of the Syrian clash as truthful, however in agreement to all-inclusive comprehension of ethical quality contrasted with none. Strikingly, there have been almost no articles from the Western media including either individuals with open profile or ordinary citizens who are from



Syria and lived there during the contention. If anything, it appears that as individuals from the district would have greater comprehension of the contention and could enhance Western news as sources or through opinion pieces.

### Theoretical Framework

#### *Framing theory*

Framing theory postulates that frames, whether small or large, establish social realism and construct meaning while also connecting personal understandings to greater structural and philosophical processes, comprising even those of prominent media institutions. Frames are critical communication aspects that determine everyday life by assisting in the construction of lived realities and reinforcing people's attitudes and behaviors across various topics (Feagin & Ortega, 2006). There are numerous definitions of frames and framing according to the academic discipline. In mass communication framing encompasses the assortment, prominence, and presentation of small tacit models regarding what exists, what occurs, and that which matters.

Thus, frames not only converge but also diverge on different aspects and phenomena. They influence the way that people think about issues in a prearranged manner. Socially constructed frames are usually repackaged and circulated across crucial mediums such as televisions, newspapers, radio, and magazines as well as through social media (Feagin & Ortega, 2006). These frames determine the manner in which people remember, assess, summarize, and understand an issue in a given way. Frames define the social construct realism as seen in the correspondents' thoughts and writings, and receivers' thoughts as well as the greater culture (Mihailidis, 2014).

Various media players across the globe tend to frame stories. The framing of stories is aimed at defining a certain narrative that is carefully crafted by the media houses. Despite the framing of the stories by the media organizations, it is not obvious that they use framing theory. As mentioned earlier in this section, framing theory entails the educated and opinionated analysis of such media frames by scholars across the globe. Through the comprehensive analysis of the frames, one is better situated to formulate a pattern for their rationale.

The Syrian refugee crisis has, without a doubt, received its fair share of media coverage across the globe. Typical of most media houses, the editorial panels tend to frame stories in very detailed perspectives. However, there has been a clear divide between media houses that support the Assad regime and those that support the rebel factions (Anderson, 2017). The divide in the media fraternity is also based on opinions regarding the resettlement and accommodation of the refugees in the hope that the conflict would subside. Traditionally, media houses are not supposed to be partisan in their reporting of news events. Through the framing of the stories, Western media houses tend to circumvent this expectation by framing their skewed stories with detailed justifications (Varghese, 2013).

Most media organizations across the globe have exploited the constructs of framing theory to meet their objectives. In the development of advertisements, for instance, media organizations ensure an ideal frame to guarantee that the outcomes of the advertisement satisfies the needs of the client. An example how the media organizations display the modus operandi of framing theory can be seen during the Obama re-election campaign. The Obama team placed advertisements across American channels claiming

that his administration was responsible for the creation of more than 4 million employment opportunities for the citizenry. As a rebuttal, Obama's main challenger—Governor Mitt Romney—placed an advertisement claiming that Obama's administration led to loss of jobs with the unemployment rate still remaining at 8% (Potter, 2015). A comparative analysis of these two advertisements posits that they are based on a contextually similar set of facts. What differs is how the frames have been developed with one focusing on the positive perspective and one on the negative. In this example, the central role of the media in the packaging and presenting the information to the audiences is highlighted vividly. Social media has also been prominently used to frame various news elements. In social media platforms like Twitter, news elements are framed under distinctive hashtags that communicate a given homogeneous news item (Smith, 2017). According to Varghese (2013), the structure of social media thrives through the clustering of individuals based on their interests and the similarity of the information being portrayed. For instance, Twitter hashtags like #ChemicalWeapons and #Assad were used together under one frame to highlight the dictatorial regime of Assad (Anderson, 2017).

One element that gives media outlets such a focal position in the communication framework is their ability to control and manipulate information. With this position, media is better placed to determine how the public will interpret certain reported matters (Briggs, Soderlund, & Najem, 2017). Ergo, media outlets tend to collect information on various events and contextualize them to spark desired reactions or interpretations. Clearly, media organizations are able to exert selective influence regarding the manner in which the audience views reality.

### *Assumptions of framing theory*

Theories have assumptions and the framing theory is no exception. Ideally, these assumptions highlight the foundational prospect in which the theory was established. As such, any argument related to the theory is only valid in the event where the assumptions exist. Lack of them will mean that the theory is vague.

The first assumption that defines framing theory is that through the editorial process, journalists select the topics that they need to emphasize. Whenever there is a set of events happening within a given news area, the reporters will choose a given news element that has more weight and focus (Erich, 2016). In such a case, the interpretation of the public will be tied to the identified news element, creating a predetermined narrative. In the case of the Syrian conflict, for instance, most Western news agencies focused on the diplomatic rift between Russia and United States. Most organizations, like FOX News and CNN, supported the American government by creating frames that favored their interests.

The second assumption of framing theory is that the audience contextualizes the information within their frames. Whenever there is a news item, the audience is also exposed and subjected to its own interpretation and creation of an audience frame. The audience frame can either be in tandem with the news agencies' frames or be against them. It is through such conditions that most media items spark debates across their audiences. In the Syrian refugee crisis, most Western media houses' frames criticized the accommodation of the refugees (Baczko, Dorronsoro, & Quesnay, 2018). With such a frame, the audience can either create a supportive frame or a counter frame. Those who support the media frame will interpret the news with disregard to the settlement of

refugees in Western countries. Those on the other side of the frame will criticize the move, claiming that the refugees have the right to seek asylum in politically stable nations. It is through this framing theory assumption that most democratic opinions have been voiced regarding issues that face societies today.

Through the consistent evocation of the frames, they become reinforced. As the third assumption of framing theory, the consistent elicitation of the frames in media will tend to reinforce them either positively or negatively. In the case of the Syrian refugee crisis, many references were made to the pictures of Omar Daqneesh in a bid to fit similar narratives, especially in frames that supported the humane treatment and accommodation of the displaced Syrians (Gowans, 2017).

The last assumption of framing theory posits that the development of a given frame is something that takes time. Ideally, a frame cannot be established within a very short time span. Instead, frames are more procedural and systematic both in the conception and the inception phases. This is evident in how Western media houses covered the Syrian crisis from when it began as protests to the deep-rooted points where distinct frames were established, covering vital sides of the crisis.

#### *Rationale for framing in media*

With these assumptions in place, one might wonder about the rationale for using framing techniques by media organizations in the world today. While the core role of media platforms is to report news, they also have to consolidate themselves as reliable sources. To achieve this, the organizations have to collect diverse information from a wide spectrum. With such huge amounts of information at their disposal, it becomes more expensive and tedious to handle such. In fact, meeting the needs of the audience in

terms of either entertainment or education becomes challenging (Gowans, 2017). As a result, media houses resolve to use framing, a technique that refines the bulk information to tiny bits that will spark the most interest from the target audience. The frames are established by giving prominence to various facts and information clusters over others in a bid to create information packages. For example, the Western media packaged the Syrian refugee crisis by putting particular emphasis on national security as well as the resource strain that was associated with the accommodation of the refugees.

Typically, it is assumed that media houses are supposed to exist independently. However, some of their decisions are influenced by external factors that force them to frame their news. In most cases, journalists are influenced by social norms as well as the intense pressure from certain groups. In the case of the Syrian refugee crisis, some media houses were pressured by humanitarian organizations that vouched for the resettlement of displaced persons regardless of the circumstances. Also, it is a societal norm to be humane and offer aid to disadvantaged populations, hence the compassionate framing of the refugee crisis by most media houses. However, some media houses like Sky News were influenced by their native governments—the United Kingdom, in this case—to frame their coverage from more of a political and governance perspective. This explains why Sky News was more inclined to the careful resettlement of the refugees to minimize the risk of terrorism as well as resource strain.

Based on the different rationales that the media houses use in the framing their coverages, it is the audience that stands to lose. In its basic form, media framing is done by organizations with their own core interests as the first priority. This leaves the audience with an interpretation of the information in tandem with the context at hand.

Depending on the popularity and acumen of the media houses, it is most likely that the audience will support the frame (Dicker, 2017). Clearly, framing theory puts the audience in a constrained position, where their perceptions and interpretation of certain events is limited.

The importance of understanding how frames work in communication cannot be undersold. The previous section put more emphasis on how media outlets strive to establish frames that meet their needs. As consumers of information, the audience is also exposed to the creation of their own frames. The audience frames, in most cases, are formulated to fit the context, beliefs, reactions, and expectations of the consumers of news. Ergo, a typical consumer of any news will use the information to fit into a given frame. In the event where the information set does not fit the desired frame of the audience, the audience usually disregards it. With this in mind, people are most likely focus on information that fits their frames and will treat any conflicting news as outliers.

Therefore, news agencies need to have proper knowledge of the frames created by the audience. With such information, they become better positioned to highlight news elements that will work in conjunction with the frames of the audience. Through frame matching, media organizations communicate more effectively and spark the desired reactions to certain public matters. With the creation of a new frame, media houses need to reference the trends within a given point in time.

Western media houses covered the Syrian war through the creation of the Syrian refugees crisis frame. A crucial analysis of this frame will shed more light on the reaction as well as the scope of thought of the Western community regarding the situation. The keyword in the frame is “crisis.” A crisis typically entails a situation that involves peril,

pain, and situational difficulties. In any media context, the word alone sparks an emotional appeal. The emotional appeal is tied to the intrinsic nature of humans to be compassionate to other people who are in a crisis. However, elements such as similarity in ideology or beliefs will most likely dilute the compassion. That is, one will be less compassionate to a person who has different beliefs or is considered a threat. This, in part, explains why some Western communities supported the accommodation of refugees while others balked at the idea. Those who supported the accommodation of the displaced Syrians were driven by the compassionate aspect of the frame. Conversely, those who disapproved of the accommodation of the Syrian immigrants viewed the crisis as a threat to them because the refugees would cause a resource strain. Additionally, the presence of terror groups like Al Qaeda and ISIL in Syria posed a threat to the Western nations (Cooper, 2018). Hosting the refugees will—most likely—create breeding grounds for terrorist factions and sleeper cells through radicalization of the locals as well as the refugees.

The word crisis also evokes a frame that defines and describe the political atrocities that face Syria. Today, peace among countries is achieved through democratic systems. This is not the case for Syria as the nation is governed by the Assad regime, which is ruthless in its autocratic governance of the region. On the other hand, the rebel factions are also in a crisis as they also use cruel tactics to counter the Assad regime. Such a frame sheds light on the cruelty of both sides of the conflict and it is through this frame that one may understand why the conflict is prolonged. Ergo, the frame provides a background to the conflict that has led to the refugee crisis, which has defined the region over recent years.



### *Framing analysis of the Syrian refugee crisis*

In recent years, the number of Syrian refugees across the globe has experienced exponential growth. As of 2016, the number of displaced Syrian was 11 million and the number has been growing ever since. Close to 4 million of these refugees are hosted in the bordering countries like Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, and Turkey. Of the bordering countries, Turkey alone hosts about 3 million refugees and has the heaviest burden globally in terms of refugee hosting (Díaz, 2018). More than 700,000 Syrian refugees are hosted within the European Union with Germany alone housing more than 350,000 refugees. Following global pressure by other economically stable nations to accommodate the refugees, the United States under the Obama administration agreed to settle 10,000 refugees across 231 cities. Canada also agreed to accommodate 30,000 refugees in 2016.

The rising number of Syrian refugees across the globe is a clear indication of the intense military and political turmoil in the nation. The nature of the Syrian conflict tends to worsen because of the number of players involved in the war. Additionally, the involvement of international players and shifting alliances has not helped the situation. It is for this reason that the humanitarian situation within the region has deteriorated by the day. Western nations have focused more on the military intervention to stop the conflict with very little assistance in the resettlement of the Syrian refugees. Therefore, the Syrian refugee crisis has worsened and has been covered extensively by the Western media.

The challenge of the resettlement of the refugees in Western nations is primarily affected by political opinions and standpoints in various countries. During the Obama administration's 2015 bid to settle the refugees, 31 governors in the United States vowed

to refuse to settle the asylum seekers in their states (Samer, 2017). The politicization of the Syrian refugees was hinged to the conservatism nature of a section of the West as well as national security matters. In fact, some of the Western conservatives based their arguments on national security threats when one of the Paris bombing suspects was found to be of Syrian origin. The situation got worse during the Trump administration when he placed a temporary ban on all immigrants from Muslim states. This was viewed as a move to impede the settlement of Syrian refugees because Syria is a predominantly Muslim nation.

The political perspective of the Syrian crisis was also evident in the European Union. Ideally, the resettlement of the refugees should be a procedural process, with vetting processes as well as the enumeration. However, war is unpredictable with people being displaced and separated from their families especially during surprise attacks. In such cases, the displaced persons usually flee to the most convenient safe haven. This is one reason why most refugees within the European Union are undocumented (Hoffman, Weiss, & Egeland, 2018). As such, Germany brokered a deal with the European Union that allowed it to return all the illegal or irregular Syrian refugees to Turkey. The deal received negative global backlash from humanitarian organizations because Turkey's resources were overstretched by the 3 million registered refugees already there. The high number of refugees in the region led to deplorable living conditions. Other countries in Europe have developed quota systems in the settlement of the Syrian refugees. A quota system disregards the human rights of the refugees in favor of the economic constructs and needs of the host countries. In the extreme, countries like Hungary have completely

refused to settle Syrian refugees—a position that displays the extreme hostilities against refugees across the globe.

The rationale for understanding the political and institutional perspectives of the Syrian war is essential points in the establishment of media frames. In the event of any conflict, most media organizations usually put particular emphasis on the social dynamics in the creation of frames as well as agenda setting. This section will focus on the rendering of frames used by Western media outlets in the coverage of the Syrian crisis.

Virtually everyone living outside Syria is guided by the news frames on the situation. This gives media outlets a very instrumental position in determining the mood and the reactive capacity of the public. To better understand the coverage of the Syrian crisis, a comparative news framing technique will be applied. Ideally, comparative framing analysis focuses on the differences in the frames used on the same story by different news sources (Cooper, 2018). As noted earlier, different news agencies have different ideologies, political standpoints, languages, and ownership, which defines their approach to formulating frames.

Syria is a predominantly Muslim and Arabic state. This is the first component that will be considered in the evaluation of the frames used in the coverage of the Syrian crisis. Traditionally, some of the common frames used by the media in the Middle East include politics, conflicts, and crisis. This is evident in the War in Terror in Afghanistan, the Iraqi War, the Israel-Palestine Gaza conflict, and Iran nuclear threats. Such frames tend to overpower other topics and issues around the Arab world. The use of the political frame—especially those that are in tandem with the Pan-Arab interests—have been used over the year by Arabic media houses to push political agendas.

In the coverage of the crisis in Syria, there is a great difference in the Western media and the Pan-Arabic news organizations' frames. Al Jazeera Arabic disregarded the prominent coverage of the coalition of forces led by the United States against the Al-Qaeda faction that had set up camp in Syria during the peak of the conflict (Deslandes, Mourlon, & Tribout, 2017). The issue of refugees in Syria has been covered using two core frames: one that humanizes their needs and one that considers them as threats to national and cultural securities. These frames are used in tandem with the victim and the intruder frame that is viewed mostly from a political standpoint (Dukhan, 2018).

The victim frame is guided by the humanization of the refugees. Contextually, refugees are viewed as innocent victims of circumstances. By being in a helpless position and displaced because of the destruction that comes along with war, they become dependent on the asylum policies of politically stable nations across the globe (Mihailidis, 2014). Therefore, the victim frame as used by most media houses focuses on the hardship that the refugees go through in their bid to seek solace. The coverage of Alan Kurdi's story by both the Western and the Pan-Arabic nations was an ideal embodiment of the victim frame.

On the other hand, the intruder frame portrays the Syrian refugees as unwanted guests. This frame bases its ideology on the notion that the refugees pose a national security threat because of their involvement in crime, terror, and other illegal activities (Jones, 2018). By extension, the intruder frame also focuses on the threat posed by the refugees on the cultural and economic status of the host nations. Some news organizations like Germany's *Der Spiegel* have expanded on the intruder frame to cover

sub-frames of xenophobia and national security threats. Some Western news organizations also view the refugees as adventure seekers who find a thrill in traveling to new destinations under the pretext of fleeing from the Syrian war.

### *Comparison of the framing patterns*

The framing of the Syrian crisis by the media houses in the West was rather different from the Pan-Arabic platforms. In its bare form, most of the Western media fraternities framed the Syrian crisis from economic, political, and cultural perspectives. Mostly, Western media outlets focused their political instability frames on the domestic Syrian politics. This is evident in CNN's and FOX News's coverage of the crimes that had been committed by the Assad regime, which was viewed by the West as one of the core causes of the war. The news organizations based in the United States also used the Syrian refugee crisis as an argumentative element in the 2016 presidential elections. Hillary Clinton, one of the frontrunners in the elections, supported friendlier immigration policies that would allow for the settlement of more Syrian refugees if she won the presidency. As a rebuttal, President Trump noted that Clinton's policies would result in more jihadists and terrorism cells in the United States. Such debates were covered widely by the American media houses with the Syrian refugees as the core points of reference. In Europe, Western media outlets also framed the Syrian crisis politically through the Brexit referendum in Britain ( International Crisis Group, 2017). The Brexit-influenced frame positioned the refugee crisis as a threat to both the economic situation and the immigration laws affected by the exit of Britain from the European Union.

The Pan-Arabic newspapers, on the other hand, framed their coverage of the conflict based on the humanitarian implications of the war on the Syrian refugees and the

role of international politics in the war. This, however, does not mean that the Pan-Arabic media houses disregarded the local Syrian politics as they were divided by opinions on the Assad regime and the rebel factions. The illustration below is a clear depiction of the choices that the Syrian children had: to die like Alan Kurdi while escaping or to be injured in the war like Omran Daqneesh:

*Figure 2: Depicting the choices that the Syrian children had*



Source: CNN

The illustration above also sheds light on the humanitarian frame media houses used for the conflict in Syria. Through the illustration, it is evident that children—or the victims of the war for that matter—have very limited options when it comes to their bid for safety. In the event where people decide to flee as refugees, they are faced with inhumane treatments and traveling conditions. The captioned picture of Alan Kurdi shows that the extreme outcome of fleeing Syria can be death. Staying in Syria, on the

other hand, leads to injuries of children and other helpless victims as it is highlighted by the picture of Omran Daqneesh.

With special interest to the Syrian refugees, most Western media houses mainly used the geographical and political frames in reporting the #SyrianRefugees crisis. Such frames were ideal in positioning the refugees as innocent and helpless people who need aid until a ceasefire is attained. The framing approach of the Syrian refugees was rather similar to the Pan-Arab news agencies. The Arabic news organizations prioritized the humanitarian frames that shed light on the plight of the Syrian refugees—in their innocence—in their need for help and that the heavy military presence was only making matters worse. Al Jazeera, for instance, covered the adverse impacts of the opposition military regiments on the tranquility of the citizens who dwelled in areas that were not affected by the conflict.

*Figure 3: Russia and USA's intervention in the Syrian War*



The illustration in Figure 8 is a subliminal approach by the Pan-Arabic news organizations to criticize the military and the political involvement of the West in the conflict. The image shows then-American President Barack Obama and Russia's Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin discussing their military interventions as the apparent solution to the Syrian crisis. It is evident that they clearly ignore that humanitarian plight of the affected civilians like Omran Daqneesh who is also pictured.

#### *Agenda setting theory*

Through the framing of news items, media houses become better positioned to set a certain agenda to the society. The setting of the agenda through the manipulation of information is a construct of agenda setting theory. By definition, agenda setting theory encompasses the ability of the media to control the weight in which a given news item appeals to the public agenda (Brown, 2018). This theory is contextually similar to the framing theory, however agenda setting theory—as a social science proponent—attempts to predict events through the use of mass communication.

#### *Empirical framework*

A study on the representation of the Syrian refugees in the Turkish media sought to determine the framing of Syrian refugees. The study used both qualitative and quantitative analysis of six Turkish newspapers. The study found that there were significant negative media frames in Europe compared to Turkey (Şahin & Yücel, 2017). The Turkish media tended toward a rights-based method. Some newspapers tended to be pro-refugees whereas others tended toward human rights. The study concluded that the source of the article had a positive correlation with the tone of the article.



Another study by Alshareif (2016) sought to determine how Western and Arab media representation impacted the staff and learners of a particular Sebha University in Libya through their coverage of the numerous spring uprisings in Arab nations. The study mainly focused on Al Jazeera and BBC and sought to depict how they represented the uprisings and whether their representation was based on a certain ideology (Alshareif, 2016). The study found that the channels were different in their manners of reporting. Whereas Al Jazeera was ideologically ambitious, BBC was trusted for its unflustered observations.

## CHAPTER III - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Chapter Introduction

This study seeks to determine the representation of Syrian refugees on Twitter accounts of Western news media outlets. For comparison and to give a general overview, four media accounts will be selected. Judgmental sampling will be the basis for selection. Judgmental sampling is where a researcher uses his or her own judgment to derive the sample size, and in this case the author will analyze the prominent media houses in the West. The research will use a descriptive survey in that it will aim to construct a profile of the given media institutions with regard to their representation of the Syrian refugees.

Quantitative and qualitative methodology were applied to tweets with the hashtag #Syrianrefugees. Qualitatively, frames were used to derive explanations. This approach used computer programs to surf over the enormous volume of data to recognize collections of words that determine the presence of a frame (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Some of the words used will be “#Syrianrefugees” and “Syrian crisis,” “scapegoat,” “asylum seekers,” and “Syrian immigrants.” The quantitative component of the research will take the form of content analysis where the number of phrases like “refugee,” “Syrian,” and “migrant” will be determined. The data collected was organized systematically to allow for interpretation. Framing analysis was further used to examine the tone of the tweets and their probable effects. The presentation of data took the form of figures and models that determine the correlation between the variables.

## Methods of Data Collection

The collection of data is one of the crucial stages in any research work. The identification and the collection of the most relevant data is essential in ensuring that the most useful results will be achieved. As such, researchers have to be careful when it comes to the collection of the data to be used in the formulation of arguments and conclusions regarding a given topic. Essentially, an ideal technique for information gathering will improve the effectiveness and significance of the outcomes from a given field of study (Kothari, 2018). Clearly, the type and nature of the data used in any study should be credible and serve as pieces of evidence to support any conclusions in the paper.

Data analysis can be classified into two major constructs: quantitative methodology and subjective methodology. As the name suggests, quantitative methodology is concerned with the observational parts of the information in question. The information gathered under this approach is quantifiable through factual terms as well as figures. Moreover, this technique puts particular emphasis on the objective nature of the research in question. The information gathered through this methodology is subjected to analytical process to yield statistically accurate inferences and numeric information that can be used to illustrate various phenomena in the study. That is, the quantitative approach extracts relevant implications and contentions from numerical representations. In this manner, the information gathered is exposed to a progression of investigations using an assortment of statistical instruments and strategies like MS Excel and coding sheets. Subsequently, a quantitative methodology of information gathering is crucial if the intent of the examination requires an objective perspective.

Qualitative methods of data classification and collection put particular emphasis on the subjective nature of the research in question. While adhering to the core goals of the research, qualitative research method gives specific consideration to the feelings, knowledge, and opinions of the respondents in the given field of study (Singh & Bajpai, 2017). In this manner, the value of the information gathered is generally dependent on the observational aptitudes of the respondents as well as the specialists involved in the collection of data (O'Brien & Broughton-Pipkin, 2017). Principally, this methodology is essential when the examination needs data from experts within a given field of study.

To ensure that the data collected and used for this research are expansive, this dissertation will adopt both quantitative and the qualitative approaches in the data collection and analysis. Quantitatively, the research will present a comparative relationship between different variables that have been used to create statistical inference. However, a greater part of the research will apply qualitative methodology. As such, qualitative frames and themes will be used to derive explanations and trends that will answer the research questions. To create the frames, computer software will be used to sort the voluminous Twitter data to establish the existence of a given frame. Specifically, the frames will be searched using the following keywords: “#SyrianRefugees,” “Syrian crisis,” “asylum seekers,” “scapegoat,” and “Syrian immigrants.” Additionally, the qualitative aspect of the study will be evident in the contextual analysis of the various phrases used in the description of the Syrian refugee crisis. To enhance the interpretation, these data was arranged systematically in Chapter 4 of this dissertation, presenting vivid grounds for the arguments and conclusions.

Based on the philosophy as well as the motive of the study, research can be categorized as exploratory, causal, or descriptive in nature. The causal research, for example, depends on experimental comparisons between identified dependent and independent variables that define a given study. As the name suggests, the exploratory research aims at researching certain concepts and establishing new ideas and concepts in already researched areas. This particular type of research design motive will be more effective in the event the researcher has established a given research niche. The descriptive research design, on the other hand, describes already existing concepts. Such research designs are imperative to critique or support already existing theories. Contextual analysis is for finding new thoughts and data with respect to a given field.

This dissertation was based on the descriptive and causal designs. Through the descriptive methodology, this paper shed light on various theories and previous research regarding the Syrian refugee situation as well as the reaction by the Western media outlets on Twitter. With such information in place, the research will be better situated to take an argumentative position that will result in credible conclusions. Causally, the research used the framing technique to form the basis of the comparison between the independent and dependent variables. This way, more insightful information will be extracted in tandem with the research objectives.

### Target Population

The identification of the target population is essential as it presents the demographic source of the primary data to be used in the research. Most of the information used in this paper is drawn from Twitter feeds, i.e., the target population will entail Twitter users. Since Twitter has millions of subscribers, the population will

be defined further to ensure that all the potential data outliers are eliminated. The first elimination criteria removed individual user accounts and narrowed the population to social media accounts for media houses. After this specification, the population was further defined to include only media houses from the West. Afterwards, the population was refined to include all the Western media houses' official Twitter accounts that tweeted using #SyrianRefugees. In this way, the research population is defined comprehensively to meet the objectives of the dissertation.

### Sampling Technique

This dissertation used the sampling technique in the collection of the primary data. The study considered the use of four Twitter accounts for Western mainstream media houses. The basis for the selection will include judgmental sampling. Judgmental sampling is where a researcher uses his or her own judgment to derive the sample size, and in this case the researcher will analyze the prominent media houses in the West. The research will use a descriptive survey in that it will aim to construct a profile of the given media institutions with regard to the representation of the Syrian refugees. The study also used framing analysis to determine the tone of the tweets by the sample size in tandem with #SyrianRefugees on Twitter. Ideally, discourse analysis entails the analysis of written or oral language use to determine the nature of events or happenings for that matter.

Explaining the rationale for the identification of the sample is imperative in the methodology of the research. The sample includes the tweets between April 27 to April 7 was selected randomly within the research frame. To ensure that the aims of the study were consolidated, the random sampling of the tweets was backed by the

judgmental tenet in sampling. Ergo, the random samples were further evaluated and skewed toward the judgmental preferences of the researcher. This is imperative because outliers and irrelevant tweets were eliminated from the study. In most cases, some Twitter users use trending hashtags with completely different content in a bid to garner more coverage. For example, a user following up on #SyrianRefugees might bump into a sports advertisement with a #SyrianRefugees hashtag. Twitter classifies tweets mostly by the hashtags and not the actual content, hence the existence of outliers within a given hashtag sphere.

The sample used for the study within the research period encompassed a total of 141 tweets selected randomly through Hashtagify online tracker. These tweets were spread across 121 Twitter users that included a random mix of individuals as well as institutions. The number of tweets and the users who formed the sample were randomly generated by both Hashtagify and Keynote. Through the aid of the computerized analytics, the tweets managed to achieve an influential reach of 383,290 people with 497,843 impressions across the globe. These figures are crucial in the quantitative analysis of the data in tandem with the research objectives. These data were analyzed in the coding sheet under the hashtag and included all the spelling variations and capitalizations.

### Coding Categories

Once the sample was identified and coded, it was exposed to various analysis measures to ensure that the most relevant information in line with the core objectives of the paper is obtained. The analysis of the dataset will be computer-aided with additional human coding. The data was extrapolated from the Hashtagify as well as the

Keynote computer tools. The computer coding categories included the keywords and hashtags that can be used to track online activities. The human coding element is essential in the evaluation of the computerized analysis in the removal or avoidance of any unwanted metrics. This is based in the fact that computerized analysis usually offers metrics under a variety of classes. Through human coding, the research identified metrics that are only relevant to the objectives of the paper. The human coding was guided by coding categories that bordered on the spelling variants of the hashtag, the demographic profiles of the Twitter users, the Twitter engagement load, the sentimental analysis, the keywords, and the Western media house position on the matter. With these coding elements acting as guides in the analysis of the content, the paper was better positioned to answer the research questions. The positive or the negative nature of the tweets were established through a sentiment analysis that is defined through a given construct. A positive sentiment in this case depicts the tweets that support the accommodation and human rights needs of the Syrian refugees. Such tweets contained opinions that were favored the Syrian refugees as casualties of the war and argued that the world should stand in solidarity to help them find temporary havens as they await the end of the war. The negative sentiments depict the opinions of Twitter users who resisted the accommodation of the Syrian refugees because of national interests and the adverse economic strains that they were purported to harbor.

This dissertation will also be qualitative in nature through the use of framing theory and agenda setting theory. Framing entails the use of distinctive frames by media houses in a bid to establish a predetermined reaction from the audience. Agenda setting theory, on the other hand, covers the manner in which media houses manipulate



information to create a given predetermined agenda. With these two theories as the underlying qualitative methodologies, the paper covered the manner in which the Western media houses used frames to portray certain emotions regarding the Syrian refugees' crisis. Additionally, agenda setting theory was used to explain how the media frame created a global agenda and to define the rationale behind the position taken by different nations on the resettlement of the asylum seekers.

## CHAPTER IV – DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

This section is vital as it presents a comprehensive analysis of the raw data with the core aim of answering the research questions. This section will consider both the quantitative and qualitative nature of the data in meeting the objectives of the research. Specifically, the quantitative nature will be presented in the form of extrapolations and graphic presentations from the computerized outputs regarding the Twitter activities of the sample. The qualitative element was used to offer a comparative base to present diverse and contextually relevant results and conclusions for the research. Also, this section will present a clear distinction between the human coding data and the computer-generated data.

### Descriptive Statistics of the #SyrianRefugees

Social media is one of the most structured platforms in digital media that is ever-growing in the world today. One major advantage that the social media platforms hold over traditional media is the ability to collect accurate data that will inform the decision-making. Ideally, through framing, most mainstream media houses use these statistics to advance a given ideology or socio-political agenda for that matter.

In this regard, therefore, this section will present a comprehensive coverage of the performance of #SyrianRefugees between April 27 and May 7, 2019 in a bid to present the most recent results. These figures and analytics are extrapolated from Keynote and Hashtagify. Keynote and Hashtagify are online statistical frameworks that track certain sets of keywords and trends and record the accurate feedbacks using a variety of variables. In this case, the results that will be used to describe the objective of this paper will be based on the #SyrianRefugees as well as other spelling variants

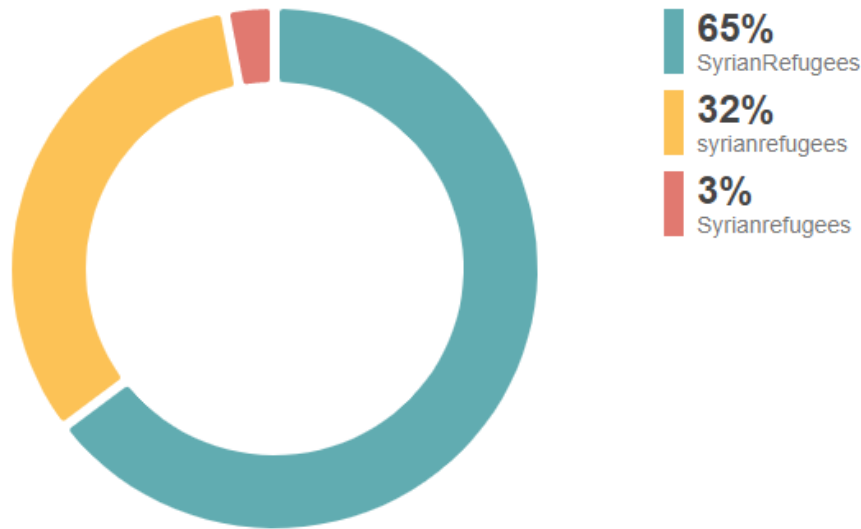
like #syrianrefugees, and #Syrianrefugees. The rationale for the inclusion of these variations is the rampant insensitivity among various Twitter users regarding sentence case due to the character limitation of tweets.

### *Spelling variants*

Twitter is used across the globe, and the users are influenced by a variety of dialects. While they may aim at communicating a certain idea, the spelling or the punctuation might differ depending on the dialect-influence. Thus, the presentation of #SyrianRefugees on Twitter featured different punctuations and spellings. As such, certain variations of the hashtags were used in the presentation of the contextual analysis of the trend. The illustration below, as an extrapolation from Hashtagify, presents a summary of the variations that defined the Syrian refugees' hashtag on Twitter:

*Figure 4: Presenting a summary of the variations that defined the Syrian refugees' hashtag on Twitter*

## Spelling Variants Used



From the figure, it is evident that 65% of the Twitter users who interacted with the hashtag were aware of Twitter requirements when writing a hashtag. A greater proportion of the Twitter community is accustomed to write the hashtags in a manner that will make it easier for readers to understand. Ideally, hashtags usually lack spaces and so it is challenging to read longer hashtags. As a result, most Twitter uses typically separate words by starting new words in uppercase. It is due to this rule that 65% (the majority) of Twitter users used the #SyrianRefugees variation, making it more popular. However, 32% of the subscribers used #syrianrefugees. Inferentially, such a segment perhaps are the people who are indifferent to how people will read and interpret their tweet. The same case applies to 3% of the users who engaged with the

hashtag in the form of #Syrianrefugees. Regardless, the digital trackers are able to locate similar topics under specific hashtags provided the spellings are similar.

### *Language*

The language of the research frame is a crucial descriptive statistic that defines the demographic profile of the research phenomenon in question. For this study, the language is important because the use of social media widely depends on how people best interact and communicate. This study used the Hashtagify platform to analyze the common languages that were used with #SyrianRefugees on Twitter.

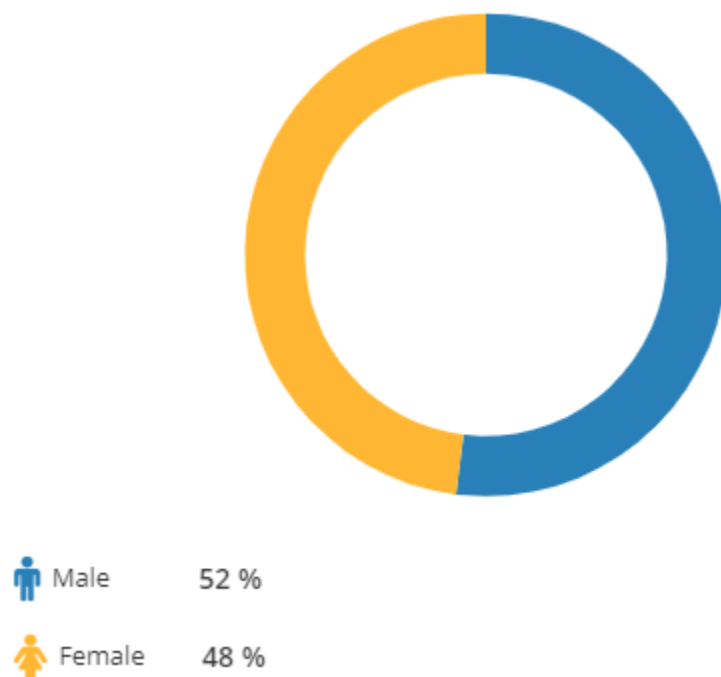
From the above figure, 92% of the individuals who interacted with the hashtag are fluent in English. This points to the possibility that most of the users are from Western countries, where English is the predominant language. However, this assumption is weakened because a variety of Asian and African nations also speak English and could have interacted with the hashtag. The high number of active Twitter users who interacted with the hashtag in English is attributed to the fact that the hashtag itself is written in English and thus attracted most English users. Of the active users who interacted with the hashtag 7% used an unknown language. Since Hashtagify is programmed with an algorithm that only tracks major official languages, it is difficult for the platform to track linguistic variations. As such, the 7% most likely used slang or native languages that could not be tracked by the algorithm. Moreover, the 7% of the respondents could have used short forms or condensed words to meet the Twitter character limits. Finally, 1% of the people who interacted with the hashtag used Arabic. This is a very crucial aspect of the research because most of the Syrians

speak Arabic as their national language. It can be deduced that the 1% is most likely a representation of the ideologies and opinions of the Syrians or Arabs who share the same sentiments as the Syrians.

#### *The gender of the respondents*

Gender is an equally imperative descriptive statistic measure that is central in the definition of the demographic profile of a given dataset. The algorithm used the profiles of the people who interacted with the #SyrianRefugees hashtag and classified them in line with their gender. This metric, however, ignored corporate entities that interacted with the hashtag because their position was dependent on decisions made by boards comprising all genders. The illustration below shows a summary of the gender profiles that interacted with the hashtag across the globe:

*Figure 5: Illustrating gender profiles that interacted with the hashtag across the globe*

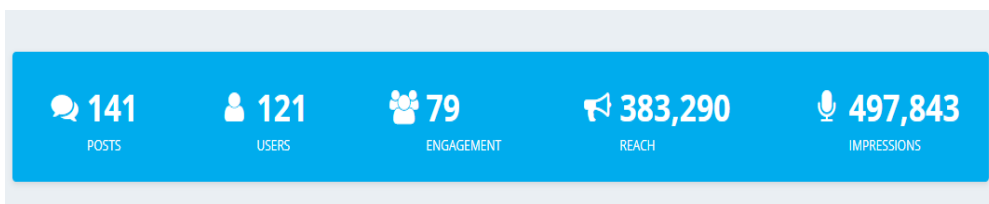


Of the people that interacted with the hashtag, 52% were men. Comparatively, 48% of the Twitter users who interacted with the trend were women. Clearly, the representation of the male and female genders was almost equal with a slight skew toward the male population. With these statistics in place, it can be statistically assumed that 52% of the sentiments made regarding the #SyrianRefugees is a representation of the ideas and opinions of men, whereas 48% of the feedback from the hashtag on Twitter represents the position of women regarding the Syrian refugee crisis.

### Twitter Engagement with #SyrianRefugees

Evaluating the engagement that a given post solicits is crucial to understanding the potential impact that a given hashtag holds. Through the analysis of the impact as well as the engagement with the hashtag, one will be better-placed to estimate the societal and communicatory impact the hashtag holds. The engagement potential of the hashtag can be measured using certain core metrics like number of posts within a given time period, the users who interacted with the posts, the number of secondary users who interacted with the posts, the posts' reach, and the overall impressions. The illustration below depicts the summary of the engagement rate of the hashtag within the research period:

*Figure 6: Showing a summary of the engagement rate of the hashtag within the research period*



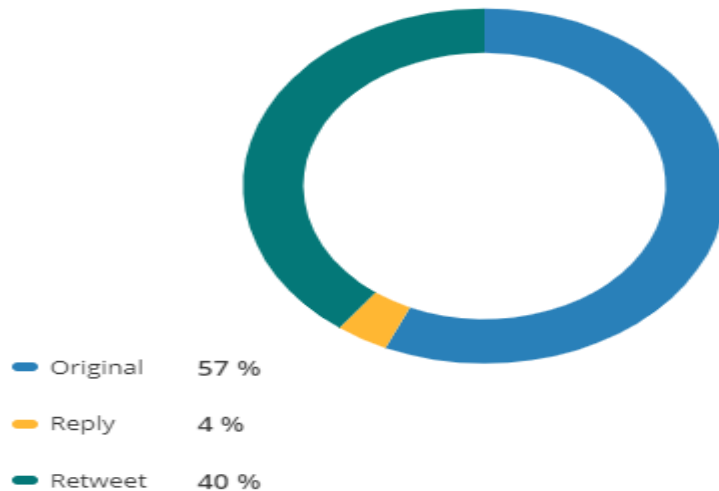
From the illustration above, 121 influencers used #SyrianRefugees in their posts within the period of the study. Structurally, any posts made by these influencers or the Twitter users were visible to their followers. Additionally, the posts were visible to any Twitter user who searched for #SyrianRefugees. The 121 Twitter users who engaged with the posts managed to tweet 141 posts regarding the Syrian refugees matter. These posts managed to get 79 engagements that are measurable by the number of likes, comments, and retweets made on the individual posts. From interactions, the posts related to #SyrianRefugees managed to solicit an influential reach of 383,290 users and the number is growing by the hour. Such an expansive effect of the hashtag shows that the topic is trending and very focal to the lives of global communities despite the duration of the conflict. The reach factor is directly proportional to an increased number of impressions that further increase the influence of the hashtag. Specifically, #SyrianRefugees secured 497,843 impressions. This number is really high given that the metrics reflect online trackers for a month.

#SyrianRefugees can be defined further through the nature of engagement. The interactions on Twitter can be measured in tandem with the original posts, replies, and retweets. The replies typically involve the opinionated reactions of the people who interact with the tweets under the hashtag. For instance, a reply will include either a supporting or disputing sentiment regarding the tweet in question. Replies are usually important foundational blocks in the creation of argumentative discussions and threads on Twitter. As such, their importance should not be discounted. The retweets, on the other hand, involve the duplication of a tweet such that another user would use an identical tweet to post to his or her followers. All in all, both retweets and replies are



crucial in expanding the reach of the tweets to the desired audiences as well as outliers. The illustration below shows the types of the tweets that defined the #SyrianRefugees crisis during the period of the study:

*Figure 7: Illustrating the types of the tweets that defined the #SyrianRefugees crisis during the period of the study*



From the illustration, it is noteworthy that 57% of the people who engaged with the hashtag used original or primary tweets. This means that 57% of the tweets using #SyrianRefugees consisted of original wordings and opinions of Twitter users. As such, the replies and the retweets that formed the cumulative hashtag tweet count were based on the 57% of the original tweets about #SyrianRefugees within the period of the study. The original tweets managed to solicit a 4% response rate from users who engaged with the content leading to discussions about the crisis. Through the responses, the sentiments surrounding the refugees' situation in Syria changed a great deal because of an increased pool of opinions from Twitter users around the world. It should be noted that opinions by individuals on Twitter are not influenced by the framing that is used by media houses and influencers to create certain agendas. Of the

tweets within the study period 40% were retweets. Arguably, most Twitter users tend to retweet content with which they agree. With this analogy in place, it can be inferred that 40% of the users agreed with the 57% of the people who engaged with #SyrianRefugees.

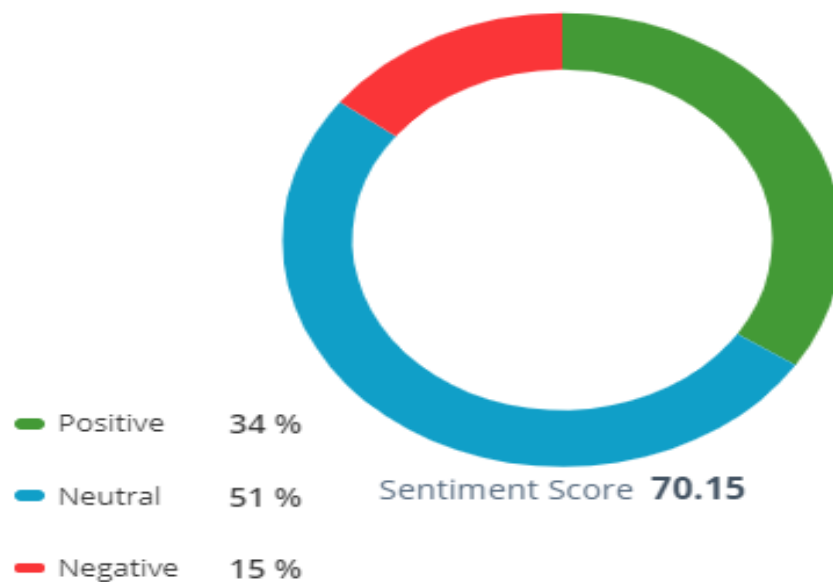
### Sentiments

The Syrian refugee crisis is one of the most sensitive topics to hit global headlines in recent years. The sensitivity of the matter has sparked debates across various divides that have taken opposing sides. While some called for urgent global action, others remained passive. Others claimed that the West is not doing enough to mitigate the matter despite the resource endowment. These varied reactions created a sentimental base that can be used to create a given mood or agenda surrounding the Syrian refugee crisis. Through the collection of data through Twitter, certain moods can be deduced based on the interactions of the users with #SyrianRefugees.

It is evident that the Twitter users who interacted with the post displayed different sentiments. The sentiments were positive, negative, or neutral. The contextual description of the sentiments is crucial to the development of this section. A positive sentiment in this case depicts the support for the accommodation of the Syrian refugees and their human rights. Such tweets contained opinions that were in favor of the Syrian refugees as casualties of the war and suggested that the world should stand in solidarity to help them find temporary havens as they await the end of the war. The negative sentiments depicted the opinions of Twitter users who disputed the accommodation of the Syrian refugees because of national interests and the adverse economic strains that they were purported to harbor. Lebanon, for instance,

discouraged the settlement of the refugees because they strained their economic activities, and received very little international aid to cater to the refugee population. The neutral sentiments encompass the opinions of passive users who were widely indifferent to the situation and conditions of the Syrian refugees. The figure below illustrates the overall sentimental score of the Twitter users who interacted with the hashtag within the study period:

*Figure 8: Overall sentimental score of the Twitter users who interacted with the hashtag within the study period*



From the illustration above, 34% of the Twitter users showed positive sentiments toward the hashtag. In this light, 34% of the users are believed to have supported the Syrian refugees' needs in their bid to seek asylum in the neighboring countries as well as Europe. Such users were compassionate with the transgressions

and difficulties that surrounded the lives of the Syrian refugees from the time the civil war began. This group is the one actively calling for action to ensure that the refugee crisis is handled on humanitarian grounds to ensure that the Syrians are accommodated comfortably. Through the accommodation of all the refugees, regardless of their affiliations in the conflict, the international community can fully focus on the ceasefire, which will present the grounds for the resettlement of the refugees. However, 34% is less than half, meaning that the majority of people who interacted with the hashtag were not invested in the humanitarian perspective of the conflict.

On the other hand, 15% of the Twitter users who interacted with the hashtag during the period of the study showed negative sentiments. This category is against the resettlement of the Syrian refugees in the various countries that were strategically located to offer the best assistance. While most countries in Europe were economically secure and able to help the Syrian refugees, they did very little to accommodate them. A common reason behind their closed borders is Islamophobia. Following the Islamic allegiance of most terror groups across the globe, various Western nations have profiled Muslims as terrorists. This is a fallacy as the terrorists are usually extremists masquerading under the Islamic religion, leading to religious separatism in the countries that they target. As a result of Islamophobia, most European nations fear that Syrian refugees will spread religious extremism to their citizens. Moreover, the European nations fear that terrorist factions like ISIL and Al Qaeda can use the refugee crisis to sneak in recruiters and sleeper cells to execute their terror objectives. Other countries in the Middle East showed negative sentiments toward the refugees as a result of their social structures as well as the financial positions. Typically, any

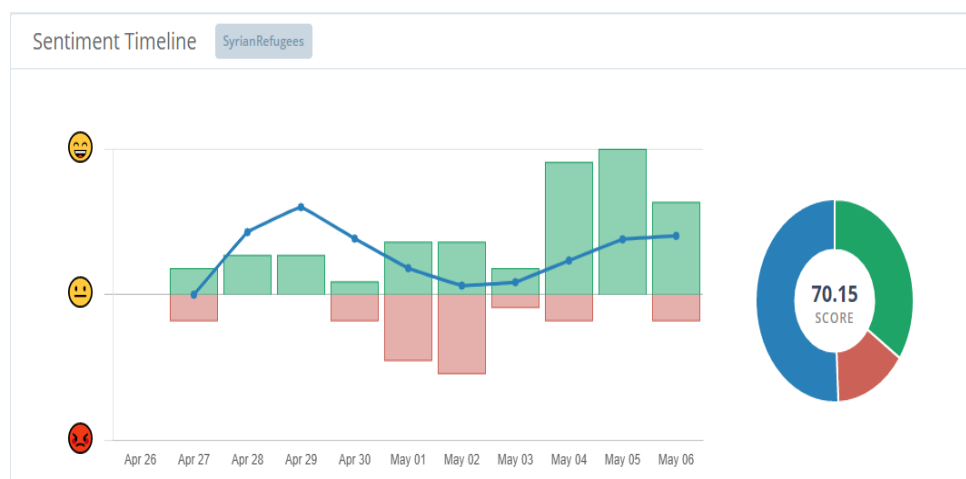
country will first protect the jobs and opportunities for its own citizens. Any influx in the number of refugees will mean increased competition for the available job opportunities and overall resources. For the sake of the citizens, countries like Lebanon have banned refugees from working in the country. Also, the country lacks sufficient internal funding to accommodate the refugees, which is similar to other nations like Jordan. The international community is also running out of funds and political support for the refugees. This pushed nations that are willing but unable to accommodate the refugees to develop a negative sentiment. These reasons justify the relatively high proportion of Twitter users with negative sentiments toward the matter. Clearly, the economic and ideological perspectives of these users or nations surpass their humanitarian obligations.

A greater portion (51%) of the Twitter users who interacted with the hashtag were neutral to the Syrian refugee crisis. This portion showed divided opinions and looked at the Syrian situation from a multidimensional perspective. This group was for the idea that countries that were economically able to accommodate Syrian asylum seekers should do so. As such, economically strained nations like Lebanon and Jordan were allowed to show negative sentiments because of their inability to comfortably house the evacuees. The rationale for the neutrality for this section of Twitter users is connected to the lack of global solidarity on the matter. The war has taken a really big structural and social toll on Syria and the whole world has sat back and watched the situation deteriorate by the day. It is only humane that the world should unite and ensure that proper attention and aid is afforded to Syria to ensure that the refugees are cared for and ceasefire is achieved. The overall sentiment score of 70.15% shows the

sentimental value that #SyrianRefugees holds for the Twitter users who interacted with the topic.

The illustration below shows the sentiment timeline during the study period. The rationale for this data is to show how user sentiments regarding #SyrianRefugees crisis that has affected the greater part of Middle East and Europe in the recent years:

*Figure 9: Illustrating the sentiment timeline during the study period*



Using the extrapolated trend line as the point of reference, it is clear that the sentiments of the Twitter users swung from positive to negative and then back into positive. However, in the majority of the research period, the Twitter users exhibited a neutral sentiment, justifying the 51% of the users who were neutral to the matter. Critically, the change in sentiments is proportional to the nature of the war as well as the event that occurred. If the study was conducted when the images of Kurdi had surfaced online, for instance, the sentiments could have shifted to the positive. Based on the contextual position of this paper, it can also be deduced that the changes in the

sentiments were influenced by the Western media outlets that exploited frame theory to sway the agenda surrounding the Syrian refugee crisis in their favor.

#### Position of the West

The importance of the geographical representation of the Twitter users who engaged with #SyrianRefugees cannot be undervalued. Establishing the location where the various tweets originated is crucial in determining whether they contained opinions from the West or the East. The illustration below depicts the regions with the most tweets regarding the #SyrianRefugees crisis when the study was conducted:

*Figure 10: Depicting the regions with the most tweets regarding the #SyrianRefugees crisis when the study was conducted*



From the illustration above, the intensity of the shade shows the number of tweets that originated from the highlighted country. From the illustration above, it is evident that most of the tweets came from the United States of America (West), Turkey (East), Sweden (West), Germany (West), Italy (West), Syria (East), Iraq

(East), France (West), Indonesia (East), Netherlands (West), Japan (East), Canada (West), South Africa (Africa), Australia (West), and India (East). Cumulatively, most of the tweets regarding #SyrianRefugees originated from Western nations. This suggests that many people in the Western world are aware of the Syrian refugee crisis and have voiced their opinions through Twitter. Specifically, the United States of America leads in the number of tweets tagged under #SyrianRefugees.

### Keywords and Hashtags

The algorithms that were used in the analysis of #SyrianRefugees used both a coding sheet framework as well as a similarity index to establish the words that were symbolic to the hashtag. This section will present a comprehensive analysis of the related hashtags as well as the keywords that defined the hashtag within the period of the research. The analysis of the keywords is crucial as it plays a vital role in the establishment of the framing analysis and the determination of the overall mood as well as the perspectives of the Twitter users regarding the Syrian refugee crisis. The illustration below shows the related hashtags that were used together with #SyrianRefugees during the period of the study:



[illegible]

86

Table 1: Illustrating coding sheet

<b>Coding Units/Keywords</b>	<b>Coding Categories/Sentiments</b>		
	Positive	Neutral	Negative
<b>#Refugees</b>	1	0	0
<b>#Lebanon</b>	1	0	1
<b>#Terrorist</b>	0	0	1
<b>#Russia</b>	0	1	0
<b>#RefugeesWelcome</b>	1	0	1
<b>#UNCHR</b>	1	0	0
<b>#SyrianChildren</b>	1	0	0
<b>#WithRefugees</b>	1	0	1
<b>#SyrianRefugees</b>	1	1	1
<b>#Asylum</b>	1	0	1
<b>#SyriaNow</b>	1	1	1

Keywords are equally important in the analysis of any social media trend or hashtag. Specifically, keywords portray the set of words that a Twitter user used while interacting with the hashtags either in the form of direct tweets, replies, or hashtags. The figure below illustrates the algorithmic representation of the chief keywords that were used in the hashtags within the study period:



Twitter is one of the most preferred social media platforms for media houses across the globe. The Twitter community is typically politically and socially astute and thus preferred by global leaders as well. Additionally, Twitter is more vibrant than other social media platforms, where the spread of information is relatively slow. Therefore, this section will present a comprehensive analysis of the interactions of BBC World News, CNN, Fox News, and Sky News with #SyrianRefugees that have graced Twitter in recent years. These media houses were identified through random sampling from the leading news agencies in the West (Europe and North America).

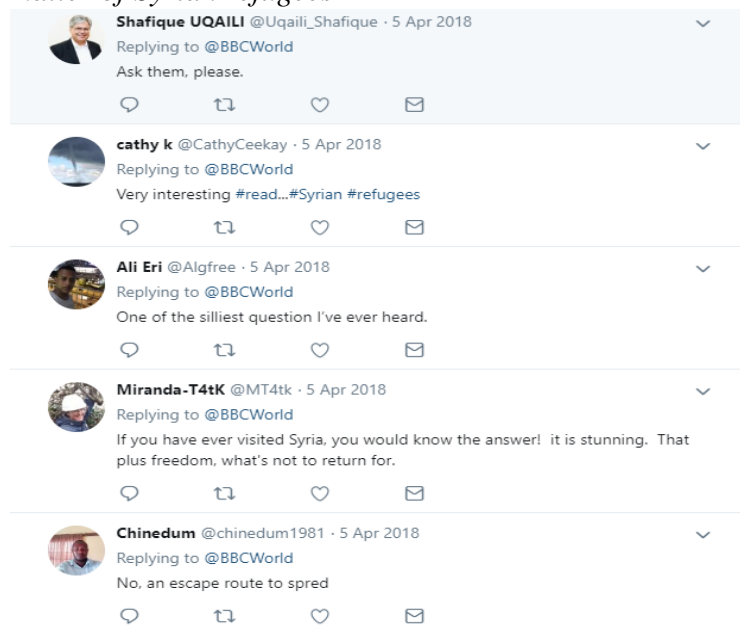
#### *BBC World News*

Owned and managed by the BBC Global News Limited, BBC World News specializes in current affairs as well as the trending issues across the globe. Established in 1995, BBC World News is one of the biggest news corporations in the world with headquarters in the United Kingdom. Between 2016 and 2017, BBC recorded the highest global audience hitting close to 121 million weekly viewers. By content, BBC World News airs various international documentaries, news bulletins, interviews, and lifestyle shows. As such, the Syrian refugee crisis meets the criteria as one of the corporation's biggest and longest news stories. Several documentaries regarding the civil war in Syria have aired in addition to weekly news bulletins covering the developments in the crisis. Moreover, several influential parties involved directly or indirectly in the conflict or the refugee crisis has been interviewed on the channel.

To meet the demand for information in the digital sphere, BBC World New has a very active Twitter account. With the number of followers growing by the day, BBC

World News's Twitter account is used for breaking news as well as commentary on current affairs. On several occasions, the Twitter account has engaged its followers on a variety of pressing global issues. Ergo, this section will highlight the position taken by the corporation as a representative of the Western media in #SyrianRefugees. The image below forms the point of reference for the presentation of the tone of the media house regarding the matter of Syrian refugees:

*Figure 13: Illustrating the presentation of the tone of the media house regarding the matter of Syrian refugees*



## CNN

The Cable News Network, commonly referred to as CNN, is an American media powerhouse owned and managed by WarnerMedia News & Sports that is based in Atlanta, Georgia. Founded in 1980, CNN became the first media house in the world to offer continuous 24-hour newscasting. As such, the brainchild of Ted Turner, CNN became the pioneer of 24-hour news media, something that the corporation has spent years of experience refining and making it one of the largest media corporations in the

world. Today, CNN has reached more than 100 million households in the United States alone and the number grows every day. The news network also has global presence through affiliates like CNN International, CNN Indonesia, CNN Philippines, CNN Turk, CNN en Espanol, CNN News18, CNN Airport Network, CNN Chile, and HLN. Through its affiliates, CNN boasts its influence in close to 212 countries across the globe.

CNN has an impressive online platform that is optimized for most digital devices from computers to smartphones. Any user can access the interactive CNN news websites for the latest news in various languages. Moreover, the American media powerhouse also has a very vibrant Twitter account that engages the followers on a regular basis. The CNN Twitter account was used extensively in the creation of a specific frame during the #SyrianRefugees crisis as discussed in the illustrations below:

*Figure 14: Illustrating SyrianRefugees crisis*



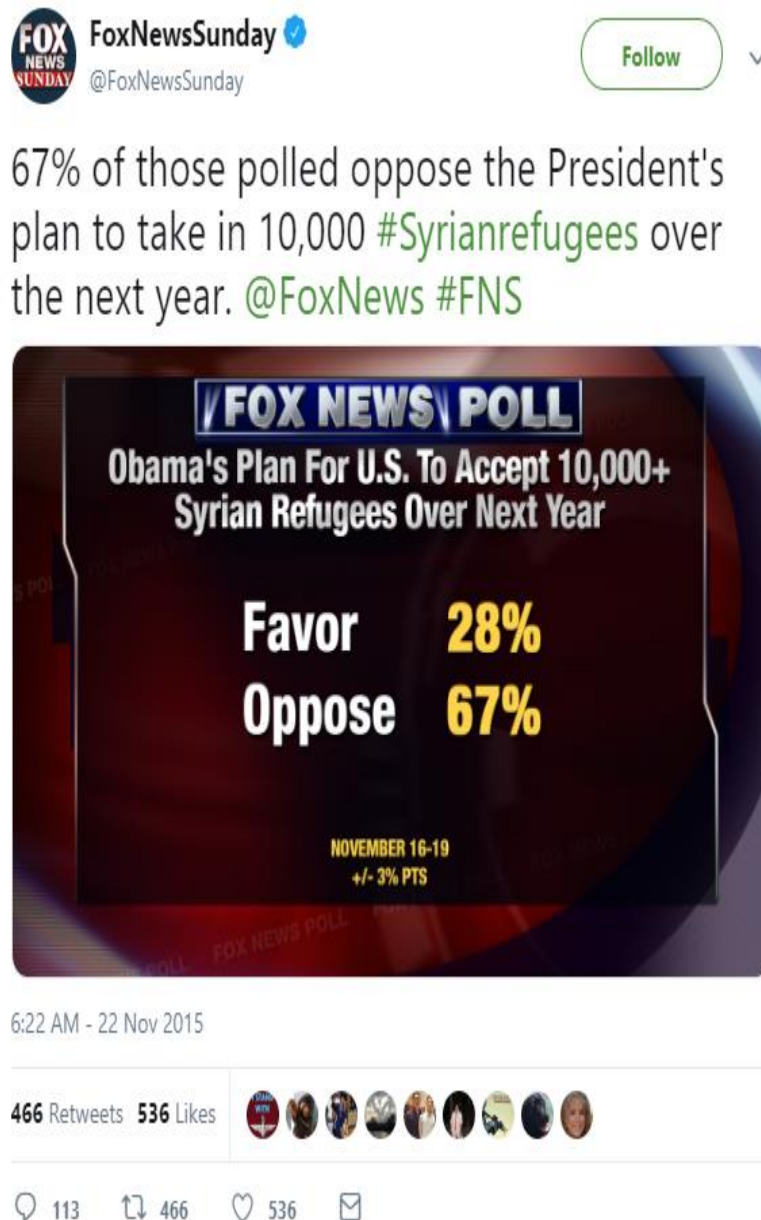
## *FOX News*

Owned and managed by the Fox Corporation, the Fox News Channel is a New York-based news channel that specializes in both domestic and international news coverage. The news corporation has its coverage in 86 countries across the globe. As the start of 2015, Fox News Channel had secured more than 94 million subscribers in the United States alone. This accounted for 81.4% of the news consumers in the country (Briggs, Soderlund, & Najem, 2017).

Unlike other media houses that tend to adopt a neutral political and ideological stand, Fox News appeals mostly to the conservative market. Based on its ideological alignment to the conservative audience, Fox News has been at the center of various controversies surrounding its purported biased reporting. For instance, Fox News has been accused of spreading false propaganda in favor of the Republican Party with special favoritism and preferences to George W. Bush and Donald Trump during their respective campaigns. Thus, the news corporation has received a fair share of negative criticism especially from Democratic Party supporters in the United States.

Fox New has various social media platforms that are used to direct social media traffic to the corporation's news website. The social media platforms are also used to engage the audiences in various matters that go hand-in-hand with current affairs. As such, this section will present an analysis of the engagement of Fox News through its official Twitter account with #SyrianRefugees. The illustrations below exemplify how Fox News engaged with the hashtag:

Figure 15: Illustrating how Fox News engaged with the hashtag



### Sky News

Sky News is owned and operated by Sky, which is a division of Comcast. Sky News operates in various media fields with a presence in the radio industry as well as the online platforms. The corporation has diversified its services by providing news content to Yahoo! News, Pluto TV, YouTube, Roku, Amazon Fire TV, and Apple TV.



Sky News operates from Britain with a vast global presence through its affiliates and sister channels. Through its Twitter channel, Sky News has managed to interact with its followers and has played a crucial role in #SyrianRefugees as it will be discussed in this section. The illustrations below show the position of the Sky News Twitter account in terms of #SyrianRefugees:

Figure 16: Illustrating the position of the Sky News Twitter account in terms of #SyrianRefugees



In the recent years, Europe has been in the spotlight regarding its policies on immigration. Through social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram as well as the mainstream media, Syrians inside and outside the nation eagerly pursue the news and

have a glimpse of the immigration situation in Europe (Shoup, 2018). Various news covers the challenging and troublesome transit of immigrants across the Mediterranean and through the Balkans ending in Austria and Germany. Despite the challenges in the traveling, these immigrants are usually welcomed in these safer countries and with better opportunities.

For Syrians, the possibility that they could look for shelter in a nation offering a blend of security, work prospects, and training merited the risks that they faced in the risky crossing of the Mediterranean Sea into the host countries like Germany and Austria. The displaced Syrians see an urgent need to travel to these countries before the opportunity expires.

Clearly, all nations with impact must advance their endeavors to end the Syrian war. In any case, until there is harmony, the nations that are facilitating and accommodating the close to 4 million refugees must get the required resources to facilitate the hosting process as they play both a direct and indirect role in funding the UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations to cater to the needs of the displaced persons. While the global community keeps pushing for work plans to allow displaced people to procure employment and add to neighborhood work markets, evacuees must be offered increasingly legitimate roads to security in the planet's more extravagant nations through expanded resettlement numbers, progressively adaptable family reunification plans, and compassionate and understudy visas. Then, Syrian exiles would unquestionably reconsider leaving their locales and taking a chance on a voyage to Europe.

## Qualitative Analysis

### *The Power of the Media*

The power of mainstream media manifested in August 2016, when the emotional picture of a drowsy Omran Daqneesh ruled front pages and other news outlets worldwide. The 5-year-old sat huddled in the back of an emergency vehicle minutes after he was rescued from a collapsed building in Aleppo, where the war had taken a more gruesome toll on the community (Saleh, 2017). The attacks were conducted by the Assad regime, which considered Aleppo a strategic city and saw an urgent need to capture it, regardless of casualties, be they unarmed women or children. Intervening on the anguish, the broadly shared picture likewise delineates the emotional effect that visual images can have in the world today. Additionally, it could initiate solidarity and mindfulness because the digital space has proved to influence greater actions in some instances. For example, the revolution in Algeria was triggered through the sharing of pictures in the digital space. The emotional picture of Omran Daqneesh—an innocent unarmed young boy—was set to follow a similar trajectory in showing the world how bad the situation in Syria was (Brown, 2018). Only one year before, the viral picture of the 3-year-old Syrian Alan Kurdi, who was found washed up on a Turkish beach after he had drowned trying to seek refuge, had sparked continental demonstrations in Europe against the refugee policies. Most of the demonstrators wanted the European nations to welcome more refugees into their countries until the Syrian war ends. These two cases demonstrate the power of social media in social activism. It animated new methods of activism that exploited emotional reactions of online communities to help drive change or support a given

ideology. It is this construct that plays a crucial role in the definition of the reactions and the opinions voiced by most people in #SyrianRefugees on Twitter. Clearly, digital media has successfully managed to achieve emotional affordance, especially in crucial global matters.

*Figure 17: Omran Daqneesh*



Figure 18: Headlines regarding Omran Daqneesh





*Figure 19: Omran Daqneesh*



*Figure 20: Alan Kurdi*



Figure 21: Headlines regarding Alan Kurdi



Figure 22: Solidarity for Alan Kurdi





*Figure 23: Tribute to Alan Kurdi in Morocco*



A critical evaluation of the two pictures shows that their sharing under #SyrianRefugees on Twitter achieved the following frames: one, the images sparked solidarity and the push for action, and, two, the images sparked affection among the Twitter users. While the two pictures depicted a more or less similar situation, the online reaction was rather different. Ergo, it is essential to review the relevant contrasts to completely deconstruct the possibilities of every photograph, regardless of whether it is for the interests of the activists or the individual Twitter users (Chatty, 2018). According to D'Angelo (2018), the different reactions to the pictures of Omran Daqneesh and Alan Kurdi create a wealthy platform for arguments about the power of Twitter and the politics of digital media. The picture of Kurdi marked the onset of an

ideological shift from the majority of Twitter users to a more humanitarian approach in dealing with the Syrian refugee crisis.

A few pictures have the ability to stir a feeling of sympathy toward the mistreated and, with other logical elements, rouse solidarity as noted in the impact of the Alan Kurdi images. For instance, 30 people recreated the scene in Morocco as a tribute to Alan Kurdi and other Syrians who might have perished while trying to seek refuge (Armitage, 2017). Different pictures, by being resonating emotionally like the photo of Omran Daqneesh, can stir a feeling of sympathy at first, and later instill a sense of compassion without resulting in action. Thus, it is imperative to evaluate the potential of images to create the desired frame based on the presentation as well as the nature of the picture in question. How the pictures are presented especially under #SyrianRefugees as a distinct media frame will determine whether the Twitter users will relate to refugees' real situations and push for action or simply sit back passively.

To get a clear narrative of the refugee situation based in the context of this dissertation, it is crucial to connect the arguments to migration studies as well as digital communication channels like Twitter. For this reason, the tweets from Syrian Twitter users who are refugees or still living in Syria will be given preferential consideration in the presentation of the arguments and conclusions. Through the merging of migration studies and digital communication frameworks, this study will achieve an integrative reflection of the Syrian refugee crisis.

Under the #SyrianRefugees hashtag on Twitter as well as other equally influential social media platforms, the photo of Alan Kurdi went viral within a very short span of time. This heightened awareness for the refugee situation affecting

Syrians as they attempted to seek refuge in the peaceful nations. The photograph turned into a symbol for immediate action, tantamount to other shared photos of youngsters that were affected by crises. Similar photos that helped establish this precedent include the 1973 photo of Phan Thị Kim Phúc taken amid the Vietnam War or the 1993 photograph of a destitute Sudanese child on the ground while a vulture lurks nearby (Dicker, 2017). Compared to these pictures, it can be argued that the photo of Kurdi had more influence because of the power that social media has in the world today. Specifically, the use of #SyrianRefugees on Twitter has played a crucial role in increasing the awareness of the Syrian refugee crisis through the use of images like the one of Kurdi.

Specifically, the photo of Kurdi added to a move from passive interaction with Twitter posts to a more active engagement with matters in the real world. Traditionally, most Twitter users as well as activists involve themselves in passive commentaries with very little action. However, #SyrianRefugees carried some weight in the creation of a distinct shift from the passive activism to a more involved reaction. This paradigm has been clarified in various ways. Gowans (2017) noted that the huge reaction to the pictures of the Syrian refugee crisis are the result of the successful conversion of empathy through the use of digital channels to fuel global reaction and action toward the crisis. Clearly, this supports the notion that online media and notable pictures matter most when visual articulations are associated with existing desultory frameworks.

A critical analysis of the representation of the Syrian conflict on social media platforms like Twitter show that the West has constantly viewed the refugee matter as

a security threat. As such, most Twitter users from the West have been vocal against the accommodation of refugees. For some, they fear that terror cells like ISIL have cemented their influence in some parts of Syria and can use the accommodation of refugees to smuggle their recruits into the West. Many Twitter users have voiced their fears regarding this possibility. The online tension and caution regarding the situation is believed to have played a significant role in the expulsion of Syrian refugees who had settled in Calais, which is a strategic French border town. The Syrian refugees had formed an informal, self-governing settlement at Calais (Heing, 2017). Many Twitter users, as well as some French government officials saw this as threatening to form a new country on French land. Therefore, close to 10,000 displaced people were expelled by the French administration in October.

The dissemination of information through Twitter has also shed light on its potential use by various bodies and factions to advance their ideologies. Most of these forces took their sides based on their geographical proximity to Syria as well as the political ramifications of the conflict. Most notable is how the conflict caused a significant territorial threat as well as regional cooperation of the neighboring states. This tension was reflected online especially on Twitter, where the users were divided in lines of solidarity and those who preferred passive reactions to the matter.

It is imperative to evaluate how the negative portrayal of the Syrian refugees especially through the Twitter hashtag #SyrianRefugees has propelled political divisiveness in the region. Arguably, the influence and impact of the photos of Omran Daqneesh (2016) and Alan Kurdi (2015) was galvanizing and transformed the global astonishment into culpability. The issue with the absence of positive activity following

Kurdi's photo does not lie in an absence of compassion, however it had an inadequate effect on the people who engaged with it on Twitter. This is a case of a lifeless and innocent child who is a direct victim of the poor management of the Syrian refugee crisis. Clearly, there was a lapse in the mobilization of the online community and by extension the global community to act with the utmost urgency. Social media is known to make things go viral and hence mobilize desirable actions and reactions. At exactly that point of intensive online mobilization the distinctive results of these emotional pictures can be comprehended. As such, it is critical to analyze the social, political, and technological paradigms that define the reaction and any action that followed the use of #SyrianRefugees on Twitter. Through such a multilayered approach, one can examine solidarity as a vital part of contemporary legislative issues of emergencies like the Syrian refugee crisis.

To develop the contentions and arguments in the initial two areas, this section will present the socio-political nature of the conflict in a bid to understand the overall stance that was taken by most Twitter users. Ideally, this will clarify how the intermingling of these distinctive conditions pushed political limits and caused complex ramifications that impeded a unified reaction based in the humanitarian emotions. Clearly, it is prudent to mention and share the conviction that solidarity is more or less the "opposite side of emergency" (Kahl, Goldenberg, & Heras, 2017). In the event there is a crisis on one side, people need to gather on the other side to ensure that the crisis is managed. In this case, #SyrianRefugees on Twitter stood as an ideal solidarity platform to ensure that people across the globe prioritized humanity over their political beliefs and fears. This section will also view the real situation faced by

the refugees when it comes to their exposure to technology. There is a wide presumption that because they came from war-torn Syria, the refugees have no access to technology or social media in the refugee camps. Understanding this presumption is crucial in establishing the rationale for the positions taken against the refugees and how the refugees failed to stand their ground under #SyrianRefugees on Twitter.

*Western Media's agenda setting for the Syrian refugee crisis*

Through agenda setting theory, media houses use various tactics and strategies to ensure that a given news element attains prominence. With this prominence or a trend, the setting of an agenda become relatively easier. One of the core avenues used by most Western media platforms in the world today is to cover a given event frequently. With the Syrian refugees' crisis, most Western media organizations covered the dangers that the refugees faced in their journey to seek asylum. Mentioning this information just once is not enough to create a debatable agenda. Therefore, Western media houses like CNN and the BBC put particular emphasis on the story of Alan Kurdi. Western media saw this image as a perfect example of the transgressions and crisis that faced the Syrian refugees in their bid to seek asylum (Zwier, 2018). The repetition of the story of Alan Kurdi, whose body was found washed up on the shore after drowning while fleeing Syria, created an agenda around the Syrian refugee crisis. The picture was used recurrently as a headline story across various media houses and social media platforms. This prominent coverage created an important agenda for the global community. The death of a child is very emotional given that he was innocent and played absolutely no role in the conflict. To make

matters worse, he ended up drowning in the Mediterranean Sea while trying to flee the war.

Despite the position that most people held regarding the Syrian refugee crisis, media outlets proved to the world that they can control public opinion. There is an obvious divide in opinions when it comes to the accommodation of Syrian refugees. A section of the Western community is in favor of accommodation while another section strongly condemns the hosting of displaced persons. By exploiting the stories of Alan Kurdi and Omar Daqneesh, media outlets successfully managed to sway public opinion to a more unified tone—a tone of compassion (Dukhan, 2018). Regardless of their political standpoints, Western media outlets spoke in one voice and frame when they highlighted the stories of Daqneesh and Kurdi. This highlighted the epitome of the Syrian war, where innocent children suffered for things they knew nothing about. In fact, their future was destroyed as a result of the conflict.

Agenda setting theory also provides ground to evaluate the rationale for selective coverage in media. As mentioned earlier, the media houses frame information to meet certain audience demands as well as those of other ancillary players. The Syrian war received only partial coverage by the Western media. In its bare form, the selective coverage of the conflict was purely motivated by the political will of the nations involved. It is noteworthy that there was a political tussle between the West—or American allies—and the Russian government. These two secondary players in the war in Syria had different opinions with the Russians showing sympathy and support to the Assad regime whereas the United States sided with some of the rebel factions. Thus, the Western media organizations like the BBC, CNN, and

SkyNews focused most of their coverage on the atrocities committed by the Assad regime. On the other hand, Channel One and Russia-1 (both owned and managed by the Russian government) focused their coverage on demeaning the activities of the rebels and the involvement of the United States and other Western nations in the Syrian war.

Like other theories, agenda setting theory also operates under certain sets of assumptions. These assumptions underpin the bid by the media organizations to create public awareness on societally crucial factors. Additionally, these assumptions also define the hierarchy of importance of the information media outlets present to the target audience. Through agenda setting theory, the society is able to know what news holds more weight. In the case of Syria, the coverage of Omar Daqneesh and the Alan Kurdi story surpassed other events of the Syrian civil war.

The first assumption of agenda setting theory is that media outlets' reporting is not necessarily a direct representation of the reality (Armitage, 2017). Through activities like framing, media houses filter news items and shape them to meet their desired outcomes. During the coverage of the Syrian war, the media houses in the West covered the stories from different angles to dictate public opinion. Depending on the events that happened during the war, the media houses formulated their news to meet their narratives. For instance, at the onset of the war, most Western media houses downplayed the situation and reported the conflict as mere demonstrations against the Assad regime. This was not a clear reflection of reality as it was much worse than what the Western media reported in the first phase.



The second assumption of agenda setting theory posits that the consistent coverage of a given news item by a media house gives it more prominence over others. Whenever a given media house puts particular emphasis on a given news item, it becomes a trend. #SyrianRefugees became a trend on the mainstream media as well as social media circles. Virtually all the media houses in the West focused on the Syrian refugees, making the refugee issue gain more prominence over other events that surrounded the Syrian civil war. On social media platforms, for instance, the story received more prominence under #SyrianRefugees on sites like Facebook and Twitter. The social media coverage on the matter was defined by the numerous engagements that the online community displayed under the hashtag.

Specifically, Twitter has been on the frontline as one of the most preferred technological applications in agenda setting for media houses and other online influencers. In recent years, the advancement in technology has reshaped how the world communicates and interacts. One major milestone that has enhanced communication across different divides is the social media sphere. Twitter, in particular, has become the leader when it comes to political debates as well as the setting of agendas.

The operational structure of Twitter makes it an ideal platform for media organizations to use in agenda setting. Twitter uses special hashtags to cluster similar ideas and content. Through hashtags, an agenda can easily be created to ensure that homogenous ideas are communicated effectively to the desired target audience. During the conflict in Syria, the Western media houses created the agenda for Syrian refugees through #SyrianRefugees. The hashtag was used to cluster similar Tweets relating to

the matter. This can be seen when a news agency like CNN or FOX News would post a story relating to Syrian refugees. Such stories will be tagged under the #SyrianRefugees in a bid to highlight the intended agenda for the content. In this way, Western media outlets used Twitter for the agenda setting as they covered the Syrian refugee crisis.

### Ownership of the Crisis on Twitter

The summers of 2015 and 2016 affirmed that online communities, especially Twitter, has a conflicted position in the portrayal and management of the movement and accommodation of Syrian migrants. The developing progression of constrained movement since 2014 saw a huge number of people—both adults and children—drowning in the Mediterranean Sea while attempting to seek refuge in Europe (Lister, 2017). Following the highlights of these situations through #SyrianRefugees, a lot of global interest was sparked. In 2015, for instance, activists on Twitter used the hashtag to push for European mercy and saw various EU states opening up their borders to the refugees. Through the use of digital platforms like Twitter, the situation caught the attention of the global community and members did whatever was within their ability to help in the matter. However, later in 2016, matters reverted as Greece shut its entryways and Germany expedited a questionable EU deal with Turkey regarding the admission of the refugees (Thiel, 2018). In this period, more than 1 million people made it to Europe by walking or by using makeshift water vessels that occasionally sank or got lost at sea. Specifically, the Syrian migration into Europe and other nations is documented as the largest human migration since the Second World War (Mihailidis, 2014). As indicated by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

(UNCHR), roughly 80% of Mediterranean Sea landings originated from Syria (49%), Afghanistan (21%), and Iraq (8%) (Oktav, Dal, & Murat , 2018). Most evacuees went to nations with existing refugee accommodation program like Sweden, or where the global outrage and Twitter activists pushed for refugee accommodation, especially in resilient countries like Germany.

Despite the dangers of migration to other countries over the seas, most of the Syrian refugees were not discouraged. One, there were no alternative means to seek refuge and the situation was getting worse by the day. Two, it was better to risk the seas than to stay in Syria and face death or permanent injury at the hands of the government and the rebel factions that killed indiscriminately (Baczko, Dorronsoro, & Quesnay, 2018). In this light, the United Nations Refugees Agency evaluated that in the late spring of 2015, more than 2,000 individuals had drowned while crossing from Libya, and the world came to know the dangers of the sanctioned sea crossings (Pearlman, We crossed a bridge and it trembled : voices from syria, 2017). In some cases, some of the asylum seekers were arrested at sea and detained for illegal entry; these detention camps were inhumane and cruel to the refugees. Despite such possibilities, most of the refugees preferred the harsh detention centers compared to the situation in Syria and sought safety in Europe regardless of their reception.

The perceptions of the civil war and relocation are firmly intertwined. Various happenings in recent years have revealed significant insight into this association. Commonly, it is the victims who have received unfair treatments and have been blamed for the crisis, leading to a widespread refugee phobia in Europe. For instance, the former French Prime Minister Honorable Manuel Valls cautioned that where the

refugees were accommodated in Europe, the countries would face a heightened risk of destabilization (Phillips, 2017). By extension, some governments across Europe feared that the Syrian refugee influx—if not regulated—can be equated to colonization. Consequently, Europe has been very skeptical toward the Syrian refugees. Such notions have shaped most of the discussions under #SyrianRefugees on Twitter, with special reference to the opinions of European patriots. By extension, social media reactions and definitions of the situation have embraced historical, political, capitalistic, imperialistic, and class perspectives that have shaped the standpoints regarding the civil war and the refugee crisis.

At crucial times of the war as well as the refugee crisis, the use of social media platforms like Twitter have shed light on various terminologies describing the situation in Syria. Twitter, for instance, accommodates both formal and informal constructs in communication. A critical evaluation of the terminologies will shed light on the mood as well as the reactions of various Twitter users regarding the refugee crisis. When one interacts with #SyrianRefugees on Twitter, it should be noted that the terms “migrants” and “refugees” are used interchangeably. In the event “migrants” is used to refer to the Syrians, it shows spite and hostility especially when used by European users. Whenever they want to show empathy, most Twitter users subconsciously or willingly referred to as the Syrian evacuees as “refugees.” Ergo, the analysis of the terminologies can be used to trace the shifts on the perspectives of the European nations toward the #SyrianRefugees crisis. Katie Hopkins, an anti-migrant activist and celebrity, was at one time quoted referring to the Syrian refugees as “cockroaches” a demeaning term used to emphasize the notion that they are unwanted. Moreover,

former British Prime Minister David Cameron referred to the Syrian evacuees as “swarms.” As a result, most Twitter users who shared in their inhumane stance used such demeaning terminologies to refer to the Syrian refugees under #SyrianRefugees.

On the other hand, activists on Twitter are on record for terming the Syrians as “asylum seekers” or “refugees.” Based on the previous accommodation of asylum seekers before the Syrian war, the Twitter activists do not blame the refugees but instead blame the ineffective resettlement schemes and policies. Ergo, there is a need to get a clear contextual and legal separation of an illegal migrant from a genuine asylum seeker or refugee for that matter. Basically, the prevailing media trends condition what onlookers acknowledge or dismiss, leading to a given school of thought. A case of such redefinitions is the primary assault on pro-refugee solidarity activists instituted through the rejection of whole nationalities—Iranians, Afghans, and Iraqis—from potential accommodation on the Greek island of Lesbos during the unrest in the Middle East (Varghese, 2013).

The term “crisis” is a prominent word in both traditional and digital media that defines the situation in Syria as well as that of the refugees. In this context, it is used to define the transgressions and inhumane conditions that the refugees undergo in their journey to safe havens. Be that as it may, the use of “crisis” in portraying these human disasters has a dehumanizing impact on displaced people by removing their individual experiences and aggregating battles from tyranny and generally speaking majestic frameworks of persecution.

## CHAPTER V – CONCLUSION

Various conflicts have graced the world in recent years and the media coverage of the altercations have differed depending on the scale of the conflict. The manner in which the conflicts are reported depict a clear standpoint of various media organizations or nations. This paper has shed more light on the representation of the Syrian refugee crisis by the Western media outlets through the use of #SyrianRefugees on social media.

Western nations are known for their political stability that has resulted in lasting peace within their borders. Following such political conduciveness, these nations prove to be ideal hubs for refugees and asylum seekers. However, a number of factors inhibit Western nations' accommodation of refugees from war-torn countries. Ergo, there has been mixed reaction to the refugee situation especially by the Western nations that are the preferred destinations for refugees. Through this foundation this paper has presented its argument in line with the Syrian refugee crisis, which has sparked different reactions and affiliations as portrayed in media coverage.

The importance of this study cannot be understated especially in the current era where social media circles carry a lot of weight in the formulation of perspectives around various matters. Clearly, the findings and conclusions in this paper are of immeasurable importance to the field of mass communication, political science, and current affairs. The refugee crisis is a matter of global importance that is consolidated in humanity and fair considerations of persons displaced due to war. Ergo, the arguments and conclusions made in this paper stand to present reliable points of reference to any scholar who will be pursuing any matter regarding the Syrian refugees' crisis as well as the media framing of the situation.

The Syrian war has escalated over the years with more parties being involved and more alliances formed in the pursuit of different ambitions. As such, the war has been increasing despite the intervention of mediators like the United Nations. This paper has shed light on the scope of the conflicts, especially from the perspective of its adverse impact. The first adverse impact of the Syrian war is an ever-rising death toll with figures exceeding 470,000 deaths since the start of the conflict. Also, more than 1.9 million people have been injured either permanently or temporarily due to the war. The conflict has also led to various disease epidemics that were attributed to reduced sanitation levels and the physical destruction of healthcare, sewerage, and recreational facilities. Also, the war led to human rights violations in the cases of public executions as well as rape and sodomy. Various cultural and historical monuments were also destroyed through bombardment and vandalism. Finally, the conflict resulted in the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Syrians. It is the displacement of the Syrians due to the civil war that resulted in the Syrian refugee crisis.

A critical evaluation of Western organizations' standpoint in the Syrian refugee crisis is essential in meeting the objectives of the paper. This paper focused on various global media houses that were on the frontline in the coverage of the Syrian refugee crisis. Primarily, the BBC based in the United Kingdom represented its contextual frames in the coverage of the Syrian refugee crisis. Through its vibrant and always up-to-date Twitter account, the BBC digital media department engaged the BBC's followers in various discussions regarding the crisis in Syria. Specifically, the media house adopted a neutral standpoint in framing of its refugee stories. Through such tweets, the users—

mostly Westerners—voiced their reactions. With an evident divided opinion, some users showed sympathy to the refugees while others discouraged their accommodation.

These sentiments were similar to those of Twitter users on CNN, an America-based media powerhouse. Specifically, CNN conducted research that indicated that most of the American states were not ready to accommodate Syrian refugees, with only five states committing to housing the Syrian refugees. Behind the tough stance for advocating against refugees by most Americans are their tough policies against terrorism. In Syria, most of the rebel factions like Hezbollah and ISIL have been classified as terror cells. The fear is that the accommodation of Syrian refugees in the United States will create an avenue for radicalization and the accommodation of terror sleeper cells. This explains the strong stand held by most CNN followers on Twitter.

It is the same for American-based FOX News. In a poll conducted to give opinions regarding the acceptance of more than 10,000 Syrian refugees, 67% of the Twitter users vehemently opposed the move. Most cited that the inclusion of the Syrian refugees into American societies posed a great threat to national security. Some Americans also associated the Syrian refugees to the terrorist factions, and claimed that they will behead them once they land in the nation. Such atrocious claims only highlight the heightened tensions that #SyrianRefugees crisis has sparked in the Western nations.

Sky News has also been on the frontline in showing the discomfort among the Western community toward the accommodation of Syrian refugees. Sky News, unlike CNN and FOX, framed its stories regarding the crisis from a more economic perspective. The Syrian refugees have been assumed to cause economic strain in their host countries because of the need for aid and the competition for human resources. Ergo, Sky News



described Syrians as economic migrants who are using the war as an excuse to achieve better economic positions at the expense of the host nations' locals. Some users who interacted with the Sky News posts on #SyrianRefugees created mockups of David Cameron personally expelling the immigrants from the United Kingdom.

From the analysis of the Western media organizations, it is evident that they portrayed the refugees in a rather similar fashion. It is clear that the West is against the accommodation of the Syrian refugees for a variety of reasons. Ideally, the media houses tend to represent the standpoint of their respective governments. For instance, CNN and FOX News frame their stories and interactions to suit the interests and political stance of the United States of America. On the other hand, Sky News is a representation of United Kingdom's political position. In contrast, non-Western media houses like Al Jazeera have sided with the interests of the refugees in terms of humane accommodation and assistance. By extension, media organizations have extended their standpoints to their followers on Twitter who tend to voice similar opinions.

A critical evaluation of the frames that were covered by the media houses regarding the Syrian war are reminiscent of other frames that were carried out in the previous wars. Specifically, the frames bordered on human transgressions during the time of war as was previously evident in the United States versus Al Qaeda as well as in the Iraqi war. The coverage of the refugees as helpless individuals sparks compassion from the audience. To enhance this, the media has exploited the use of images as is evident in the use of Alan Kurdi's and Omran Daqneesh's photos. Showing the world how innocent children are dying and getting permanent injuries as a result of the conflict is an optimal personification of inhumanity.

Conclusively, the frames of Western media outlets specifically displayed the refugees as helpless victims of the war who faced additional challenges while seeking asylum. By being helpless and desperate, the refugee resorts to measures that lead to a rift between them and their potential hosts. One of the most common cause of rift between the hosts and the refugees is the attempt to illegally migrate into other countries without following the proper procedure.

### *Limitations*

The study faced a number of limitations that affected the collection and analysis of the data in tandem with the core research objectives. First, the paper was based on subjective decisions, something that is associated with the use of a single coder to evaluate the data. Second, the opinions of some of the Twitter users who engaged with the hashtags were skewed toward a given side with no specific, identifiable motivation. The other strengths of the paper outweigh the limitations, hence the guaranteed efficient results. The data yields the opportunity for future research on the importance of social media in shaping the social outcomes of conflicts as well as shaping the reactions of the international community.

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